

FELLOW TRAVELLERS;

OR,

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

E1110

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ MARGARET; OR, PREJUDICE AT HOME.”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1858.

The right of Translation is reserved.

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

“It will all be one, a hundred years hence,” is a saying so common as to be familiar to all. It is one of the popular sayings which is most frequently repeated in moments of jollity and utter absence of thought, by lips to which none of the heart’s best blood has rushed, giving even involuntary sanction to its utterance. On the face of it, it is a ready and cheery way of disposing of the trifling mishaps which perhaps a hundred minutes may suffice to disperse in the imperceptible void which we are continually leaving behind us; but, like everything else ready to our use and familiar to

our thought, it is liable to misuse, and it strikes us as being an unseemly boast at the best, when we hear it fall from lips pale, or quivering, or rigid, in the utter abandonment of grief, or the recklessness of ruin and despair. It will not be all one a hundred years hence with anything of importance that is now. No, not even if this sorry, unsatisfactory life of time, with its mistakes, and bereavements, and stunted endeavour, be the only life for which we have individually to plan, and struggle, and provide. Such a saying, as "It will all be one, *five* years hence," could never have become current amongst us ; for men are habitually indifferent only when they lose sight of self ; forgetting, or not understanding, or not caring, how surely the acts of every lengthened life shall influence the destinies of myriads yet unborn.

Looking back instead of forward, it is easy enough to understand all this ; easy enough, without referring to history, or to the particular achievements that enabled individuals to fix the fate of empires. In our own home we may, every one of us, trace that which is to some source, more or less distinct, in the past. If we have our skeleton in the closet, we can refer to the time when it was clothed with living flesh. Do any amongst us ever seriously consider whethe

he or she is eventually to become that skeleton, in some home that must thrive or decay under the perhaps clearer light of the days that are hastening on ?

“Let the dead past bury its dead,” says the poet of progress ; but there are regrets that may not be so put aside, as well as others that might be kept in sight with advantage to this present, and also to the future, in which most of us are well inclined to place unlimited trust. To some bitter lesson, forced upon them long ago, thousands may ascribe whatever has since tended to strengthen or weaken their hands by the way. They profited by the lesson, or not, according to their natures or their opportunities ; their passions were roused for evil, or their energies for good ; and their descendants will bear distinctive marks of being more or less under the control of influences that have already sufficed to make or mar many a human destiny.

It matters not by what hand this present history is traced backward to its source. Thou, reader, whosoever thou art, whose spirit is reverent, and so true to the instincts implanted within thee at the beginning, to which none—thyself least of all—can fix a date in that far, outlying past ; thou only shalt be empowered to

lift fold after fold of the ample curtain that must be withdrawn altogether before even thou canst truly discern what intimate bearing that which has been must always have upon that which is, and is to be. The work is thine own ; even the judgment must be thine ; enter upon thy task, acknowledging, now and ever, that this life in the flesh is the most awfully solemn of all the sealed mysteries respecting which, until the final awakening to a higher life, we may do little more than dream.

At the close of a sultry August day, twenty-five years ago, two remarkable-looking men might have been observed engaged in earnest conversation in the shadow of the tall cliffs that skirt the shore in the neighbourhood of Scarborough. Both were visitors to the place, and one, the younger, was an invalid. Both were literary men—that is, both wrote for and lived by the press, and the elder individual had obtained some celebrity as a lecturer. This personage had accompanied his friend for the twofold purpose of affording the latter the pleasure and solace of congenial companionship during his sojourn in a strange place, and of obtaining for himself such advantages as a few weeks' rest from mental labour and inhaling of the sea breeze

seemed naturally to promise. Further, each had a strong regard for, and, in different degrees, a generous appreciation of the intellectual powers of the other.

It was easy to guess at a glance to what class of the community these two belonged. There was a peculiarly wild, poetic look about the younger man, Charles Moore, who was in his twenty-fourth year, partly the result of allowing his long, black, wavy hair to float about his face and shoulders in picturesque confusion, and leaving his handsome throat exposed above a Shelley-like coat and collar; but more certainly because of the fire that seemed literally to burn in his dark eyes, and a frequent sudden lighting up of the whole intellectual face, as if the spirit within were almost continuously under the influence of some inspiration. The highly nervous and poetic temperament of the young man was also apparent in the extreme delicacy and grace that characterised his person altogether, and in the restlessness that seemed to compel a frequent change of posture as he lay reclining on a fragment of rock interlaced with seaweed, looking up earnestly and reverently—and with a wonderful revelation of the love that is so closely allied to some scarcely endurable pain, too—in the face of

one who stood to him in the relation of a great Master.

That other one, the wonderful man that was, and is, and is to be ; that personification of the daring doubt, and bold investigation, and stern questioning, and iron-hearted resoluteness, and self-sufficing and defiant power that sees no God, and acknowledges none ; the man James Fraser, presented a strong contrast to his younger, and too irresolute, and impassionable friend. He was at that time upwards of forty ; his figure was above the middle height, and broadly set, muscular and large-limbed without being stout. His head, of an unusual size, was thickly covered with lightish-brown hair, slightly grizzled, which blending with the bushy whiskers that met under his chin, formed a framework to the whole countenance, that was more of a singularity in that day than it is in ours. His massive square face and strongly marked features had a power about them that was all the more potent because it could not be ascribed to anything in particular, the whole countenance being stolid and expressionless in the extreme. Very rarely a most melancholy smile flitted across it, as a winter sunbeam across a piece of waste land ; and his large, grey eyes regarded you with a sad quiet-

ness, not penetrating, but apathetic, as if conscious of looking upon nothingness; and the same dreary gaze wandered on to the nothingness beyond and around. The eyes themselves had a faded, dim look, as if behind them lay the smouldering ashes of some extinct fire. They reminded you of exhausted volcanoes; for in this feature as in every other, taken singly, there was evidence of departed power. Any one capable of arriving at the truth would have decided respecting him, that at some former period he had lived a full life; that he had suffered greatly because his spirit was strong; that he had died because it was unconsciously weak; that he had risen again and yet was virtually dead; dead, notwithstanding the supernatural power which sustained him, notwithstanding the human sympathy of which he was not wholly divested, and which in return refused to shut him out of its pale.

Charles Moore, with his ardent temperament and versatile genius, was intellectually a pigmy in comparison with this singular man, and he knew and acknowledged this, recognising, as others did, the still strong if no longer glorious spirit, whose wings, mighty, and soiled, and riven, gave indisputable evidence of the height

from which it had fallen. Worshipping intellect as something real, and half-inclined to the belief that everything beyond this was vague or unreal, he had upresistingly allowed himself to be overshadowed by a mind gigantic in its proportions, but not great or strong in the degree that implies originality, and the power of standing grandly alone. James Fraser, a first-rate mathematician and logician, a master of all the sciences; a profound thinker and writer; a public speaker so practised and eloquent that he never failed to carry his audience along with him, whatever the matter of discourse might be; was well enough inclined to consider himself as being the centre of a system, and to distinguish his satellites above the herd of lesser stars that shone afar off. He was an inspired man, but not divinely inspired; he could not, like the Man Christ, give himself freely, and then forget himself, and thenceforward think of, and work, for his brethren only. The very nature of his belief and doctrine precluded the possibility of any such self-sacrifice on his part. He was a prisoner in the spirit no less than in the flesh, speaking to those who were in like bondage; and he did not profess to do much more than disclose to those thus bound some of the most awful secrets of their prison-house.

Not publicly, because the public mind was not yet prepared to receive him as its greatest of prophets ; but to the so-called enlightened, the deep and troubled thinkers, whom he naturally attracted by his various knowledge, and afterwards bound to him by congeniality of sentiment and thought ; he declared that revelation was untenable ; that in these latter days we were spiritually as dark as were the first worshippers of created things. Not with levity at any time, not always with bitterness, but ever with a most saddening and sad solemnity, James Fraser propounded his convictions ; and the “sublime despair” of the strong, earnest, eloquent man, never failed to leave a lasting impression of mingled admiration and awe, even on minds that after wavering in his grasp finally recovered their balance, and kept it, and thenceforth stood safely aloof on the rock of a belief stronger than his own.

This minor state of bondage ; these choked, pent-up streams of thought and feeling ; this fettered utterance, invested him with a peculiar and solemn interest in the eyes of the initiated who watched his public career. Amongst them he was usually spoken of as the Great Dumb Man. With certain literary personages it was a sufficient letter of recommendation to know respecting

another that he was in the confidence of James Fraser, who did not in any way notice dullards or fools : and Charles Moore was eminently distinguished above all others by having won upon the personal regard of the great, solitary man. This was the relation in which the two stood to each other at the time when we introduce them. Apart from the high appreciation of genius common to both, there was no likeness between them ; so that the very dissimilarity of their natures might be said to be the attraction that bound them so closely together. The younger man, ardent, enthusiastic, looking forward to a glorious personal career, and inclined to hope even against hope for the future of his kind : he, a husband, loving his young wife, and in spite of everything that could be advanced to the contrary, acknowledging through every pulse of his being that life is a glorious possession ; he could not contemplate the desolation so complete, the sorrow so profound and silent, that seemed to set his friend—who, upon principle, refused to form any near tie—apart from other men, without yielding to a tender compassion, and a resentful impatience with the mysteries threatening to overwhelm himself, that at times swelled his heart with a strong agony. And on

the other hand, the great, hopeless, pitying heart of James Fraser yearned over this soul, so bright and gifted, so earnest and full of love, and so surely destined, as he believed, to undergo the change that should finally leave it, dimmed and wasted; the shadow of its former self; loitering on the desolate shore of time until with other phantoms it should vanish and be no more. His love did not incline him to soften or disguise his own convictions respecting the utter worthlessness of life, on the terms by which men hold it, and the impenetrable darkness that settles on its close. He had no sympathy with those who shrink from what is true merely because the truth happens to be bitter. Neither did he consider the strength or present temper of mind or body of those he addressed, so that it was inevitable that he should sometimes oppress and disturb his hearers to an extent that was not advantageous to the cause he advocated. And it so chanced that on the occasion to which we are referring, Charles Moore, whose nerves had recently been shaken by a severe illness, and whose thoughts naturally wandered at times to the young wife, soon to become a mother for the first time, whom he had left in London, could not help wishing that he and his friend had not

fallen on the particular discussion that detained them under the shelter of the cliff long after the last loiterer on the shore had passed from their sight, and the old shadows had become merged in the gathering twilight, and other shadows had taken the place allotted them by the moon and stars. Mentally and physically, he was in the kind of mood that inclines a man to relaxation of thought: and he felt no less oppressed by the powerful utterance of his friend than by the gloomy grandeur of his theme—the slow, weary, profitless march of nations and men from nothingness to nothingness. But there was a spell upon all who heard the Great Dumb Man speak, and he had been speaking continuously for two hours, when he stopped with a suddenness that occasioned his companion to half rise from his reclining position with a great start. Iron-nerved himself, and absorbed in his own thoughts, James Fraser did not observe this action in his companion, but stood firmly as he had been standing for hours with his back planted against the rock, his arms folded over his broad chest; a very colossus of a man. Charles Moore cast a troubled look across the water and some minutes elapsed before he spoke.

“All that is within me,” he said at length, “resists the idea of annihilation. Even a state of suffering—never ending if you will—is less terrible to contemplate. Our very instincts lead us to this conclusion; and instinct is before reason, inasmuch as it assures us of what *is*, whether reason allows that it *should be* or not.”

“The instincts of to-day are not the instincts of to-morrow,” said James Fraser, in his calm tone. “You speak as all men can before they have suffered greatly, and in vain, for any purpose that they understand. The instinct of the man who has writhed long under anguish, of mind or body, or both combined, leads him to crave for ease, rest—these two on any terms; and these still, rather than any sudden translation from extreme misery to extreme felicity, because the first extremity involves an exhaustion that is incompatible with the idea of a mere change of violent emotions. The nature of which we know somewhat, is outraged by surprises that seem to happen out of the usual pale of things. Joy and grief in their excess have suddenly stood face to face with men and women who have recognised them, and dropped dead in the instant, or gone mad. There is nothing really terrible in the fact of annihilation; as a

mere idea it frightens those who refuse to look facts in the face. The error and suffering, the disappointment, and doubt, and dismay, and wrong and cruelty of this world, even its unsatisfactory pleasures that at best pass with their season, prepare men's minds imperceptibly for such a final merging of all things into nothing. I have never yet met with a man many removes above a mere animal, who would, if he could, live his past existence over again. I should myself prefer being blown into ten thousand atoms at any moment you please. If you do not crave to go again over the past—if it is too painful—why crave to live on for an unknown future? To be denied this, is no punishment—it may be a great mercy.”

“I cannot bring myself to contemplate the past as something altogether perished and gone,” said Charles Moore. “I have not buried my own dead out of spiritual sight; I have not ceased to dream of a good that may reach perfection. I would not willingly believe that the heroic and the philanthropic, the benefactors of our race and the defenders of our land and home, pass from their struggle and their labour of love, without true recognition and reward, into an utter oblivion. This is what I feel, without

being able to prove to you or to myself that what I consider to be only right is true. O Maestro! it is all too terrible! Annihilation! The fact may well be familiar to you, who consciously possess the power over other minds that compels them to feel and acknowledge their own nothingness in comparison. See! for two whole hours I have not smoked. I swear that nothing mortal could have so compelled me literally to forget my pipe for so long a time."

The sad smile flitted over James Fraser's face for an instant, and left it blank as before. Not a smoker himself, nor a drinker, nor taker of snuff, he regarded these habits in others with perfect indifference, and looked on quietly while his young friend filled and lighted a short, black pipe.

"Do you remain in the same mind about extending your journey to-morrow?" he asked, after Charles Moore had been smoking for some minutes in silence.

"So much so, that I have written to Mary, desiring her not to address me again here," said the latter. "Selby, as I informed you, is on the coast, and lies about twenty miles north of this place. The walk should be interesting, and I now feel quite equal to it. In fact, I am im-

pressed with an idea that this walk is to complete my cure, or otherwise to turn out to my advantage. I believe I had a dream the other night that signified as much, though in a very indistinct way."

"Perhaps it is the destiny of the bachelor uncle to bequeath all his wealth, at some future day, to the great nephew or niece of whose expected entrance into this world of ours he is at present unconscious. Let us go to Selby by all means," said Mr. Fraser gravely.

"I fancy John Rycroft will not have much wealth to bequeath to anyone," said the other with a light laugh. "I must plead guilty to having a large share of superstition in my nature; for it is true that, if I had not dreamed about taking this walk to Selby, it would never have occurred to me to pay a visit to my uncle. As I told you the other day, I do not know him by sight. He saw me when he came to my mother's funeral, sixteen years ago; and that, I believe, was the only occasion on which he ever entered my father's house. I am sure that my father did not like him, because he always avoided mentioning his name. The dear, good man!" he continued with a sigh. "A great grief it must have been to him to be compelled so to

stand aloof from the brother of her he had loved so well ! You must perfectly understand that I also consider him to have been quite unworthy of being so nearly allied to my mother, Catherine Moore."

"It is one of the few circumstances for which we have reason to be thankful in this world," said James Fraser, "that all who are born of the same blood are not necessarily akin. Your own brother may be to you the greatest alien and stranger that you would meet in a day's march. If people would better understand this great truth, they would not, perhaps, be so ready to visit the particular sins of an individual on unoffending heads. We will visit this John Rycroft, then, not expecting to find him anything akin to either of us."

"I think we could not do better," said Charles Moore. "I should not have known what I do know about him—that he was alive, and unmarried, and residing in the neighbourhood of Selby, as steward, or something of that kind, to a gentleman of ancient family and large property of the name of Osborne—if I had not some time ago heard his name accidentally mentioned by my friend Raikes, who is, as you know, managing clerk to the firm of Frost and Dalton,

solicitors in the City. Mr. Osborne is one of their clients. I am afraid there is a little weakness about me—that I am hoping to find Mr. John Rycroft something better than I have any reason to believe he could be. However, it will not interfere with our arrangements, if we find that the outside of his house is the pleasantest part of it.”

And so it was decided that they should start on foot for Selby early on the following morning.

CHAPTER II.

GIVING himself entirely up for the time being to his friend; following wherever the latter's poetic fancy, his love of the picturesque, or his taste for antiquities led the way; readily and without question, as might have done some great, shaggy, faithful dog; now reclining with him on a carpet of the richest grass, lying under a group of trees, whose shadow fell across the source of the clearest and noisiest of brooks; now helping him to explore the recesses and decypher the annals of some quaint, old church; now to scramble to the highest point of some crazy old tower, by a flight of circular steps that scarcely afforded a footing; now starting with him out of the way to visit rock, or waterfall, or Roman road, or whatever else was reported as worth seeing; James Fraser, who carried a small leathern valise, strapped across his shoulders, found himself, at the close of a very long day,

tired and within sight of the small seaport town of Selby. In order to the better understanding of the character of James Fraser, who, pagan as he was, possessed a warm human heart, it will be necessary to add in this place that, had he been journeying the same route alone, he would not have halted, much less turned out of his way, in consideration of any one of the various objects that proved so attractive to his companion, he having no tastes of the particular kind ; so that he might be said to have put a constraint upon himself in order to gratify himself—that is, to minister as far as lay in his power to the gratification of his friend. Charles Moore himself, though he had borne up wonderfully, under the influence of pleasurable excitement, declared himself to be thankful that he had reached the end of his journey.

Walking up one of the steep streets—for the town is partly built on one side of a high rock—Charles Moore's quick eye detected a signboard swinging in front of a second-rate inn.

“Here we are !” he exclaimed, touching his companion's arm, and directing his attention to the object that attracted himself. “ ‘The Osborne Arms !’ I look upon this as a propitious beginning. It is really remarkable, is it not ?

Do you know, I begin to think seriously that my dream meant something extraordinary. What a history I shall have to give Mary! Let us walk in."

Smiling drearily out of the fullness of the compassion that his young friend's buoyancy of spirit, and romantic and determined hopefulness, always awakened in him, James Fraser signified his assent, and the two entered the inn together.

It was an old-fashioned house, with two gable ends in front, having a low-porched doorway leading into a narrow passage out of which other passages branched, each opening upon innumerable small, cosy-looking rooms, only to be entered by means of two or more steps that led up or down. Before entering one of these, the two dust-soiled and weary travellers encountered a stout rosy-faced servant girl, of whom Charles Moore requested that she would inform her master that they wished to see him. The girl, in a very self-possessed manner, for a mere country girl, if she was nothing more, leisurely surveyed the new comers from head to foot, smiled in a peculiar manner, and without speaking, departed upon her errand.

At Scarborough, and more especially in the villages through which they had passed during

the day, the remarkable personal appearance of the two friends had so far excited attention and curiosity as to compel some consciousness of the fact in those individuals, who had borne the scrutiny with perfect resignation or stoical indifference; but there was something in the manner, and above all, in the smile of this young woman that wounded the sensitive feelings of Charles Moore to an extent that compelled him to make an exhibition of his annoyance. The impression she had received was evidently not flattering; there was no lurking atom of awe, or admiration, or even common respect, in the look with which she had regarded them, but, on the contrary, such decided evidence of their having appeared to her in some ludicrous light, that it was impossible for such flesh and blood as Charles Moore's to stand it unmoved. His usually pale face flushed crimson, and hastily entering one of the small rooms, he flung himself into an arm-chair, and looked around him impatiently.

“An atrocious place after all, I fear,” he said; “these small, low rooms are like ovens in warm weather. That was a decidedly plain girl, and rather pert, I think. Certainly there is nothing like a first-rate inn.”

James Fraser, who had been taking notes, had a melancholy laugh to himself. "You think, in fact," he said, "that everything does not look so propitious as it did three minutes ago? Well, perhaps not. But here comes the landlord."

The man who entered was a middle-aged, sleek, anxious-looking individual, who bowed civilly as he asked his customers what they pleased to want.

"You are the landlord, I suppose?" said Charles Moore.

"Yes," he said, "he was—to his sorrow."

"You don't find the business answer, then?"

"No, not at all, sir: we've not been here long, and we was regular took in, sir. I was waiter at the George, at York, sir, fourteen year, and wanting to go into business for myself, I heard of this place and took it. We come here six months back—me and my missis, and the young woman you see. But it's a bad concern, sir; nothing to do worth speaking of."

"I'm very sorry for you, landlord," said Charles Moore, filling his pipe and lighting it. "It seems to be an old-established concern, too, and the sign should be a popular one. The Osbornes are great people hereabouts, I think?"

"To tell you a piece of my mind, sir," said

the ex-waiter, rubbing his hands nervously, "the old house ought to be pulled down; the sign-board ought to be pulled down; and them as the Osborne Arms belongs to, ought to be pulled down too. That's how it is, sir; it's a bad concern altogether."

"Ah, indeed!" said Charles Moore. "I suppose we can stop here to-night, landlord? and if so we will retire to our rooms at once, and wash away some of the day's dust, for we have travelled far."

The landlord said he should be happy to entertain them; and having refreshed themselves in the first instance with a good wash, and afterwards with tea and a steak, the two friends invited their host to take a glass with them, being wishful to learn some particulars respecting the Osbornes, in whose history, during the past ten years, Mr. John Rycroft might be expected to figure.

"You see, gentlemen," said the landlord, who had first been led to speak of his own troubles, "all the respectable custom had gone from the house before we come. The Osbornes has a bad name, and all belonging to them has a bad name—the miners as is the roughest lot you ever did see; and such a set of swearing, dare-

devils for tenants and companions Mr. Osborne has as no gentlemen as was a gentleman would keep about him. When the miners are off for a spree, they come here; and the others come here, and turn the house out of windows; so that decent people are scandalised and frightened. It's gone on from bad to worse, they say, ever since Mr. Osborne came of age, and that's more than twenty years back."

"Is the man married?" asked Mr. Fraser.

"He was, sir, and has a son and daughter grown up. Some say he killed his wife with a blow, and some say he only broke her heart; anyhow, she died soon after the son was born. The daughter is three years the oldest, and has always been at home; and nobody doubts about his often beating *her*, for the servants has told, and the screams has been heard. He had a fine madam in the house for years, that pretended to be a governess, and she beat Miss Osborne too, and between them, people say, the poor young lady was likely to grow up an idiot, she was so cowed and kept down. Once she ran away, and they fetched her back, and kept her a long while a prisoner; and a year since her aunt, Lady Cope—that's Mr. Osborne's sister—took her to live with her somewhere in

Norfolk ; but she's come to the hall again lately, and Lady Cope with her. And how any lady can live with Mr. Osborne, and in such company as he keeps, women and men too, caps me, sir, to know."

"And the son, where is he?" said Charles Moore.

"The son never lived at home, sir. Mr. Osborne seemed to have the grace not to like to let his son see his ways. He's got a low notion of women, sir ; he says as much in all sorts of company, boasting, as if it was something to his credit to think as he does ; so he kept his daughter with him, not caring what she saw or heard. And such scenes that poor thing must have seen ! They do tell things that make one's flesh creep ; but it's to be hoped they're not all true."

"Is he supposed to be rich?" asked Charles Moore.

"No end of riches, sir. Mines and estates without end, up and down the country. And he had need be rich for his ways, for he throws money about like dirt when it's to help on any wickedness ; but as for any good he ever did, nobody has heard of it yet. But rich as he was to begin, people say he'd have squandered everything long since, if it hadn't been for Mr. Rycroft."

“And who is Mr. Rycroft?” asked Charles Moore.

“Mr. Osborne’s steward, sir. A clever business man he is, according to all accounts, and steady too, which is a good deal to say, considering what example he’s had before his eyes. It’s been whispered about that Mr. Rycroft’s the worst of the two, only a great hypocrite; but nobody believes it. It’s my opinion he must be a very good man, or he wouldn’t have come out so clear as he does from such a concern.”

“Perhaps if he had been only a moderately good man, he would have cut such a concern long ago,” said Mr. Fraser.

“Well, that may be said, too, sir. The place was to be filled by somebody, and another mightn’t have done so much good in it.”

“Have you heard of any particular good that he has done?”

“Why, yes, sir; he’s been a check on his master, and has improved the estates by good management. May be the heir will have to thank him, sir.”

“Have you seen Mr. Rycroft?” said James Fraser. “You have, often—what is his personal appearance? Does he look like a man who has been brooding for years over the details of such

a hideous history as you have broadly sketched out for us? Is he lean, and haggard, and hollow-eyed? Is his form bent, and do his eyes seek the ground when men look at him? Does he not hesitate to hold out his hand when others extend theirs to him in fellowship? No! Then he is an ordinarily comfortable-looking, sleek, important, respectable personage, who is sufficiently self-possessed to observe all the proprieties of life rigidly; he is condescending to his inferiors, accessible to his equals; and certainly most orthodox in the matter of deferring to those placed in authority over him. Well, it is too bad that slander should make free with a personage who is so capable of conducting himself with propriety."

"You see, gentlemen," said the landlord, who was considerably bewildered by this speech, "I can only relate matters as they were told to me. Of Mr. Rycroft I can speak, certainly, because I've met him often; and a nice spoken gentleman he is—to such as me, you know;—why he'll talk to me quite as affable as you do, and seems quite concerned when I tell him how matters stand. The house did belong to Mr. Osborne, but it was sold some time ago—I only wish Mr. Osborne was such a gentleman as Mr. Rycroft is."

"Oh, it's all right!" said Charles Moore, who

had been puffing away at his pipe. "Mr. Osborne has a mine somewhere in the neighbourhood, I believe?"

"Yes, at Burnham, seven miles off. It's a wild place, where a man may lose himself on the moors or among the rocks. They get iron-stone there, sir. If you go amongst the miners you'll find 'em a queer lot, sir. We think a many of the people here very queer, sir,—me and my missis, and the young woman you see."

"I can very well believe," said Charles Moore, himself laughing heartily as he spoke, "that the young woman we saw has been doing little except laugh at the queer people she meets ever since she came here. I rather like queer people myself; and I shall certainly visit the mines. I suppose the Osbornes have an old family mansion somewhere?"

"About three miles off, sir. You may pass it going to the mines, one way. It's a fine old place is Staunton Court, sir, as any I ever see. Too fine for them it belongs to, I think."

The two friends arranged that they should visit the mining district on the following day; and having ascertained that Mr. Rycroft's own residence lay very near to Staunton Court, they decided upon proceeding to the mines by the

other route, and paying their respects to him on their return. On the following morning, the landlord, who exerted himself to oblige his guests, introduced them to a farm servant living in the mining district, who was just about to return home, and would, if they liked, act as their guide. Gladly accepting this offer, they set out at once in company with the latter individual, a loutish-looking young man in a smock frock, who had under his charge a heavily laden cart. Passing through the town, they had a good view from the elevation on which it was built, of the small harbour with its shipping, of the German Ocean stretching away to the horizon, and of the curious old church erected on the highest pinnacle of the rock, and only to be reached by means of a long flight of steps. Out of the town the scenery was romantically picturesque, the richest fertility and most rugged barrenness offering on every side the strong contrasts and pictorial arrangements, which, to an artistic eye, would continually present something new and beautiful if dwelt upon for a lifetime. To the distance of a mile several handsome mansions appeared at intervals, standing conspicuously on some bold eminence, or lying in the valley embosomed in trees. Farther on, lay an open road, having a

wood of young fir and ash trees on one side, and on the other a seemingly interminable tract of waste land, overgrown with furze and broom, and covered with jutting blocks of grey mossy stone, that shewed in the distance like sea waves. On this side, and on the straight road lying before them, earth and sky met, and shut out all further view.

Before journeying thus far, Charles Moore had tried to enter into conversation with the countryman, of whom, however, he could get little beyond monosyllables. Lumpish as he looked, and dull as he was for any purpose to which Charles Moore could want to put him, he was evidently good-humoured, and had a constant grin on the broad face that was every now and then turned stealthily towards the two men of whom he seemed to have a sort of charge; and this latter circumstance, as well as the outlandish appearance of the strangers, evidently amused him mightily in his sheepish way. They were still on the open road, when Charles Moore, refilling and lighting his pipe, seated himself on one of the blocks of stone that lay nearest the road, and desired the guide to stop his horse, an order which he obeyed at once. James Fraser threw his huge frame upon the ground, and

commenced chewing the broom at a rate that made the countryman stare.

"That horse of yours is heavily laden, my friend," said the originator of these movements, "and we have been going up hill for some time ; I should like to see him have a rest, if it is all the same to you. Your master is an unwise man,—some people would say a cruel one—to use his cattle in this manner. That is a load for two horses."

"'Twarnt a man as did it, and there ain't a man as would, that I know on," said the guide. "Nubbut a woman would think to work a poor beast like this here."

"A woman ! ah, I see ; you have no master ; you live with some lady-farmer : well, my good fellow, you should have explained to her that this sort of thing would not do at all ; that it was positively cruel to the poor beast ; you need only have said *that*, I am sure, and she would have given a different order at once."

The man stood looking at the speaker with his mouth half open, either very much astonished at what the latter had said, or not understanding him. Mr. Fraser explained :

"The gentleman says, that he is sure no woman could be so cruel as to overwork a horse."

"By gosh! do he say so?" exclaimed the man, who seemed well enough able to speak when he stumbled upon a subject he could understand. "I wish he knowd our missises: danged if they wouldn't work a man to death, let alone a horse, an' think nowt on it."

Charles Moore was a worshipper of woman in the days to which we have turned back. He loved to exalt her—to associate her with all beautiful things, all gracious deeds, all delicate thoughts and fancies. He had hitherto enjoyed the great advantage—or disadvantage, as it might prove in the end—of living almost altogether in that poetic world which is commonly said to be of a man's own creation; but which is in fact more visibly stamped by, and infinitely fresher from the hand of God, than is the coarser world which men *do* contribute largely towards making, as well as marring, for themselves. Seeing that this man was a rude, unlettered boor, he attributed what he had said to his boorishness and his ignorance.

"My good fellow," he said, puffing away at his pipe as he spoke, "is there any one subject that you at all understand? You live close by the mine, don't you?"

"Yai."

"Our landlord told us that your master could show us over the mine—that he was overlooker, or something of that sort. You seem to have forgotten that you have a master."

"T' missises is *his* mester, and our'n too," said the man, with a broad grin.

"Why, he's not married to half-a-dozen of them, is he?" asked Mr. Fraser.

"Noa," said the man, "he's a bacheldor."

"Then who are these missises that you speak of?"

"Mester Thorpe's sisters: Miss Lavinny, an' Miss Susan, an' Miss Martha."

"And these young ladies live in such a wild place! how very interesting!" exclaimed Charles Moore.

"A lot of old maids, I suppose?" said Mr. Fraser, coolly addressing the man, and demolishing his friend's castles in the air at the same time.

"Owld, an' wizened, an' stingy enough to flea a cat; an' vixenish, and driving—well, they *can* just drive above a bit. Whoaa! t' awld horse knaws he'd best be going, or we shall catch it when we get hooam—whoaa!"

"I think we may as well be walking on," said Mr. Fraser, raising himself from amidst the

bushes, on which the countryman thought he had made a pretty good meal; and no one objecting, they walked on accordingly.

On, until the monotonous level line lying before them was broken up. On, until the first object, that appeared to be the ruined tower of some old castle, was proved to be the crowning pinnacle of the bold headland of a long ridge of rocks that broke into the distance, and stretched north and south, and yawned and inundated and abounded in lights and shadows, that seemed partially to reveal, and yet effectually to hide, some mystery of their own in the face of the broad, blazing day and sunlight. On, until the level road became a dizzy height; beneath which the barrenest of moorland scenery stretched south and west, with no visible high road or pathway, but instinct with the life of a rushing stream of water, that met the rocks at their broken base, and boiled up, and swept on with the speed of an arrow, and spread broadly in deep-shelving, cavern-like nooks, and finally disappeared at the foot of the great rock, as if bound on an exploring expedition to its very heart.

Charles Moore stood for a long time, as men only can stand when there is a strong spell upon

them. He had put aside his pipe ; he had forgotten alike the young ladies of his dream and the old maids of the reality which he had not been able or had not cared to grasp. The countryman with his cart had slowly toiled to the bottom of the steep high-road ; James Fraser was standing silently and patiently at his side, with his arms folded ; and he knew nothing except that the scene before him—the beauty, the magnificence, the grand, old, solemn power and glory of it—had absorbed him, soul and sense, as the sun absorbs a dew-drop. The touch of his friend's hand at length thrilled through him like an electric shock.

“I am compelled to inform you,” said Mr. Fraser, “that our guide yonder is waiting, and looking this way, evidently wondering why we loiter behind. He, poor fellow, is compelled to remember that, if he wastes his time, he may be called to account when he gets home. This is a sad, matter-of-fact world for you to live in, my friend.”

“A glorious world !” exclaimed Charles Moore. “How glorious ! What was that theory of the old Egyptians about the universal soul ! Truly everything about us seems instinct with an immortal life. How lavish is nature !

how full is this earth of the beauty for which we instinctively crave ! of the grandeur that fosters in us all proudly-ennobling aspirations ! Who could look upon a scene like this, and not feel that ample provision has been made for all the higher necessities of his being ; and, feeling this, how shall the soul say to itself, ‘ Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther ? ’ ”

“ That which delights the eye, does not supply the wants of the needy, craving body, or yield satisfaction to the eager expectancy and desire of the heart, or make clear to that innermost self, that mystery within a mystery which we name our soul, the sometimes maddening and always impenetrable secrets of its prison-house,” said Mr. Fraser. “ These mere sensations flit and fade like shadows on the grass. A great grief will suffice to fill every avenue by which such can pass, and effectually bar them out. Suppose you learned at this moment that your Mary was dead ? You shudder at the very supposition ! What would then be to you the glory of nature and this earth ? There are those before whose vision the funeral pall of dead affections and hopes has once dropped, never to be lifted again on the light of sun, or moon, or stars.”

There was a touching, though proud and stern sadness in the tone, a slight quivering of the strong man's lips, as he said this, the only allusion he was ever known to make to any trouble in his own past. Charles Moore, with his generous, ready sympathy, and loving nature, was at once subdued ; and strongly grasping the hand he took in his own, and over which for an instant he bowed his head in reverence, he walked on in silence until the two found themselves in the valley.

The high-road turned abruptly to the right, passing under the great headland of rock that they had seen from above, and narrowing as the travellers pursued it, amidst scenery almost inconceivably wild, and barren, and rugged. At a point where the road barely admitted the cart and a single pedestrian to move on abreast, a horse and rider appeared in the distance, approaching at a sharp trot. The countryman, who had hitherto appeared to be very much at his ease, suddenly seemed to labour under the constraint and embarrassment that men of his class usually feel and exhibit when the presence of a superior requires them to be upon their best behaviour. Having hastily released the hands that had been clasped together behind

him, and rectified his lounging gait, so that he stood at his full height, and armed himself with his whip, he addressed his companions in a subdued tone, and evidently with a consciousness of conveying to them very important information.

"That's t' mester coming. Yo'd best walk slow behind t' cart, an' if he stops to say owt, yo'll get a good sight of un."

"Is there anything particular about him that he should be worth looking at?" asked Mr. Fraser.

"My good fellow," exclaimed Charles Moore, "we shall be very happy to look at your master, but what we chiefly want is to speak with him. Just pass out of the way, and let us come in front. Why, what's the matter?"

"Tellee this ain't t' mester yo want," said the man, roughly pushing the last speaker back. "Yo'll get me into trouble, yo will, if yo make free wi' t' mester. It ain't such as yo he's used to hob nob wi', an' yo'd best keep back. Yo *had*!"

In this new situation their guide had proved that he could be insolent. Not in obedience to his commands; not because of his superior strength—for Charles Moore possessed the skill

that would have settled him in a few seconds ;— but because—for a wonder—the latter was able to keep his temper at the moment, and was so far curious respecting the “coming man” as to resolve upon having the good sight of him with which he had originally been admonished to content himself ; the two friends, who usually acted in concert, fell back, and from behind the cart witnessed the meeting betwixt the great man and the boor.

The former slackened his pace as he came nearer, and the latter stopped his cart. The horseman stopped also.

“That’s you, John, is it ?” he said, glancing, not at John, but at the two strangers. “So you’ve been to Selby ?—oh. Did you see or hear anything of Bell ?—oh. The idle scamp ! when we catch him I’ll let him know who’s master. So you’re going straight on to Moorlands ?—oh. Did you meet Mr. Trevor by the way ? No—oh. Stop—I’ve a piece of paper here that I forgot to leave with your master. Mind he has it directly, now. There it is. Drive on, John, drive on, and look sharp.”

The horseman galloped off as he spoke, having directed a full, parting look at the two strangers. It was a self-important, insolent look, that seemed

at once to say, "Do you know who I am?" and, "What do you want here?" and the friends returned it in their own way. The perfectly good sight that they had obtained of him led them to the conclusion that he was a rather short, thick-set, coarse-featured, and decidedly common sort of personage; having that in his look, and bearing, and speech, which unmistakably stamps a man with the class he belongs to. He evidently could not keep out of sight the consciousness of his own consequence, that forbade his acting the gentleman for a moment—his so far forgetting himself and the instincts of his low nature and breeding, as to perpetrate any extempore act of courtesy. There was the one peculiarity about his brief conference with John, that he had anticipated the possible replies to his questions, which John, with his mouth open, and his hat off all the time, did not answer—probably for the good reason that he was afforded no opportunity. However, on the whole and altogether, John seemed to be very much gratified by what had taken place.

"Yo may walk afore t' cart now if yo like," he said, in a manner that was sullen enough, though he meant it to be gracious. "That's Mester Rycroft that's just gone by;—yo

mayn't have heard on him ; but he's such as yo won't often meet wi'. Gee aup ! yo lazy awld brute—gee aup !”

Charles Moore, keeping his place behind the cart, for an instant covered his face with his hands. “ Oh, my friend !” he exclaimed, “ don't believe that I am anything akin to that man !”

“ Do you believe that it is possible for me to fall into such a mistake ?” said James Fraser, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder. “ Am *I* anything akin to him ?”

“ But what a comfortable, sleek, self-satisfied rascal he looked, didn't he ?” said Charles Moore, suddenly brightening up. “ What a large share he seems to possess of the assurance and pretension that must go a long way towards backing up what is called ‘ good luck ’ in this world ! You saw how the brightness of his presence suddenly threw us into the shade with yon fellow, who is goading on that overloaded brute of his in obedience to Mr. Rycroft's injunction that he should ‘ look sharp.’ ”

“ It is all right,” said James Fraser, in his quiet way. “ Nothing is so well calculated to keep a check upon the vanity of man or woman, as this being compelled every now and then to understand what sort of people are held to be

infinitely superior to, or more desirable than yourself;—especially if there has been any particular desire in you to stand well with those who are thus ready to put you aside and down. Such experiences are bitter enough sometimes; but bitter only because of misconception. Those to whom we are truly akin do not so wound us; and for the rest, we are willing enough to let them go in the end.”

“Yet acknowledge that many real, if small, inconveniences arise from this putting aside and down,” said Charles Moore. “We just now, for instance, must suffer annoyance if we find that John’s master is too nearly akin to himself or to Mr. Rycroft.”

“Many real and *not* small inconveniences may arise from that same putting aside and down,” said James Fraser; “but in such a matter as this—O Charles, Charles!—when you have suffered really; been down into the great deeps of trouble, and struggled, and got out half dead, you will not care much for anything you may encounter on the surface of existence! John’s master will not be John, nor Mr. Rycroft;—no two men are exactly alike. He may be akin to both, and yet serve our purpose.”

The savage grandeur of the scenery for the

next three miles so completely rivetted the attention and commanded the admiration of Charles Moore, that for the time, Mr. Rycroft was forgotten altogether. At length the road opened upon the dreariest of moors, and here the driver of the cart stopped, in order to point out to the travellers the direction in which the mine lay, it being distant about half a mile.

“And shall we find your master there, or any other person who is connected with the mine?” asked Charles Moore.

The man said, Mester Thorpe might be there, or he might have gone home to dinner; but they would find “a mort” of folk about. He was obliged to go on at once to Moorlands—the name of the farm where he lived; but if he did not find Mester Thorpe there, he should go to the mine to deliver to him Mester Rycroft’s message. There was a village, he said, about half a mile beyond the mine, containing a small inn; and to this place the travellers—dusty, and hot, and tired—determined to direct their steps in the first instance, so having remunerated their guide, who grinned his thanks and departed his own way, they continued their route alone.

But not alone long. It was the miners’ dinner hour, and most of them, their habitations lying

near, went home to that meal. Men, young, middle-aged and old, and uncouth, shaggy-headed boys, presently passed them singly or in droves, evidently regarding them with curiosity, and cutting coarse jokes at their expense, which excited much laughter without being intelligible to the strangers, who could not catch all that was said, and who were not ready at understanding the peculiar English of their northern countrymen. James Fraser, who remained silent and unmoved as a rock under most circumstances, and Charles Moore, whose curiosity was excited by what seemed to him a troop of mere savages, walked on without seeming to observe the notice they were exciting, until a particularly rough-looking individual pushed against the former by accident or design, and then asked him why he didn't keep out of the way. This seemed to be the signal for a general onset.

"Whoi doesn't ta shave thy beard?" exclaimed one; "thou'd look as weel again wi'out it."

"What will ta tak' for thy poipe?" said another, addressing Charles Moore.

"Are ta a missiondary?" asked a man who placed his huge, dirty hand on James Fraser's shoulder as he spoke.

“Na, thou fooil,” said another, “he’s na missiondary—missiondarys doant go about like billygoats. What didst ta come here for, now?”

“To see you,” said Charles Moore, very complacently puffing away at his pipe.

“Tha didst, did ta? Thar’t a noice un. Will ta foight, now?” and he made a show of pulling off his coat.

“No ;—thank you all the same.”

“Would ta loike a duck i’ t’horsepond?”

“Not by any means : pray don’t trouble yourself.”

“Wha’ does he say for hissen?”

“Oi dunna know : oi’l get ar Jem to lick un.”

The same style of conversation and attack was continued until the strangers reached the door of the inn, which they were compelled to enter with rather undignified precipitancy. Going into the first room he saw, Charles Moore threw himself into a chair and laughed immoderately.

“My friend has been amused, you see, sir,” said James Fraser, addressing a gentleman who was seated at a table with a cloth on it, engaged in turning over the leaves of a note book.

“I beg the gentleman’s pardon ; I didn’t see him,” said Charles Moore. “I really can’t help laughing for the life of me. You will excuse me

I am sure: this is my first visit to the mining district." And he laughed again, without seeming to have the power to stop himself.

"Oh, laugh on by all means," said the gentleman; "it'll do you good—give you an appetite for dinner. I suppose you have not dined. May I ask if you have walked or ridden far? You are strangers here I see," he continued, addressing Mr. Fraser.

"We walked from Selby this morning with the intention of visiting the mine," said Mr. Fraser. "I suppose that it is *possible* to visit the mine; and that in the presence of those who have authority over them, the men we encountered just now can behave themselves with propriety."

"Ah, you have had an encounter with your miners!" said the gentleman. "I see. A rude, uncultivated set of fellows they are certainly; but what better can be expected from men who have all their lives been treated as mere beasts of burden, out of whom a certain amount of work was to be obtained, and who have never been required to take a step beyond this beaten track for themselves or others? Circumstances have made them what they are, and we must quarrel with the circumstances rather than with them.

And it is no laughing matter, when we consider that this brutalising system has been, and is likely to be, continued from generation to generation. Perhaps you had an introduction to my friend Mr. Thorpe. May I enquire if you have seen him ?”

“ We are perfect strangers to this part of the country ; we have no introduction to any one ; and we are, I believe, trusting that chance will befriend us,” said Mr. Fraser, turning as if for corroboration of what he had said to Charles Moore, who had suddenly become grave.

“ Gentlemen,” continued their new acquaintance, who was himself perfectly gentlemanly, middle-aged, and prepossessing in appearance, with a pair of remarkably pleasant, honest looking eyes ; “ you will do me the honour of dining with me to-day. I only wish that my own house was nearer, that I might entertain you more worthily. My name is Trevor, and I reside near Selby. I am not hurried for time, and after dinner, if you have no objection, I shall be happy to introduce you to my friend Thorpe, and to accompany you over the mine.”

Mr. Trevor’s manner was evidently so sincere and cordial, that the two friends could only accept his proffered services in the same spirit in

which they were offered. He left them for a few moments to give additional orders about the repast that had been preparing for himself; and on his return, and during the meal, he entered freely into conversation, gaining more and more on the good will of his acquaintances of the hour by the liberality of his sentiments and his intelligence.

“It may occur to you as something odd,” he said at length, “that being so near my friend’s house I choose to dine here where the accommodation, as you see, is poor and small. You may be inclined to think of him as he does not deserve when you find, that understanding how I have passed my time here, he will not ask me why I did not go on to Moorlands, or indeed give me any invitation to go at all. I know him to be the most hospitable, open-handed, warm-hearted fellow in the world, and you must understand that, in what I am about to say, I am merely actuated by a desire to place him before you in a true light.”

His hearers assured him of their entire confidence in his good feeling and faith.

“Detraction is one thing,” continued Mr. Trevor, “and a plain statement of facts, in order to elucidate the truth, is another. For my own

part, I do not quarrel with man or woman for being this thing or that. We are born with our propensities, and if these are allowed to grow upon us we become offensive and mischievous or not, as the case may be. I claim the right of keeping as far aloof as possible from those I do not like. I do not like Edward Thorpe's sisters (there are three of them) who are masters and mistresses both at Moorlands, where Edward himself is only a lodger, and in that capacity not held in much consideration. The ladies are in the habit of counting the cost of entertaining their few friends, and considering it incumbent on them to retrench as far as regards themselves for some time afterwards. This was a habit with their father, who always dreaded coming to the workhouse ; and betwixt the latter, who died at a very advanced age, and the former, who are all older than himself, Edward had a weary life of it from his boyhood. When the old man died without a will, these ladies, who had been accustomed to have absolute control over everything, were clamorous in their lamentations ; declaring that if their brother took the power into his hands, as he had right to do, they should all be speedily brought to ruin. Edward, who is certainly wanting in self-reliance and self-respect, who is ready enough to do what good

he can in any direct way that lies before him,—or rather, I should say, ready enough to compound with any difficulty, whether for his own advantage or not, for very peace sake,—quietly resigned all claim in favour of his sisters, and continued to be a sort of hireling in his own house. I am not describing to you a brilliant character, gentlemen, or one with which I expect that you will readily sympathise.”

“I confess for my part that I do not sympathise with mere weakness and incapacity,” said Charles Moore. “The good about your friend is all negative, and one does not recognise half a man.”

“If my friend be merely weak and incapable and nothing more,” said Mr. Trevor, “it is only natural and inevitable that he should be treated as he is on all hands. We were boys together, though I am several years older than he is, and at school he was always at the head of the classes, leaving me amongst others far behind. His capacity for receiving learning of all kinds was of the first order. He was a modest, reserved, meditative boy—not overshy, nor particularly sensitive, and he could be resolute enough on occasion. Intellectually, therefore, he is somewhat, besides being learned; and it is

equally true that those who believe that they understand him thoroughly, and who certainly seem to manage him as they like, are nothing in these respects. I do not myself pretend to read character well ; I confess that I do not thoroughly understand Edward Thorpe, intimate as I have been with him during the greatest part of both our lives. Edward is a disappointed man. Quite early he wished to enter into one of the universities, and to become a barrister. Mr. Thorpe would not hear of this, and took him from school in order to set him to the plough. Subsequently, through the intervention of his eldest sister, who has pretensions of some kind to being learned herself, he was sent back to school, and so home again to the farming business, in which he never made much progress. Five years ago, shortly after old Thorpe died, Mr. Rycroft gave up his situation as overlooker and general director at the mine. Of course, you do not know Mr. Rycroft."

Charles Moore, who had already avowed to his friend his intention to obey his instincts so far as to avoid coming in further contact with John Rycroft, or making known his relationship to him, replied that he had seen the gentleman, and mentioned their meeting by the way.

“John Rycroft,” continued Mr. Trevor, “is a thorough business man, and in this respect, as in every other, the very opposite of Edward Thorpe. Perhaps, even during so brief an interview, you would observe that he is rather domineering in his manner?”

“Domineering, certainly ; and vulgarly supercilious and conceited ; and altogether decidedly disagreeable and offensive,” said Charles Moore.

“Well, we won’t be too hard upon him at once,” said Mr. Trevor, smiling ; “though I have nothing to say against your impressions, he is no favourite of mine. The five or six years, during which he ruled in this place, will be remembered by generations yet unborn. His leading idea is, that in order to get any good out of those put under his authority, he must compel them to understand that he is master. He will have such a thing done in such a time, because it is his will. Iron-framed himself, he set the example of working incessantly, late and early, allowing little respite for repose, and none for recreation. This constant driving and keeping to hard drudgery had its deteriorating effect on the man in many ways. ‘I’ll let you know who’s master here,’ was a sentence heard scores of times in a day in the mine and out of it ;

and the hard, fagging work went on with a rapidity that took away the breath of lookers-on. This enforced drudgery, the presence and example of the man who, while he compelled obedience himself took no rest, grew into a sort of terror. Some amongst the men, of weaker intellect, became gradually quite imbecile, creeping about in an idiotic way, but mechanically yielding obedience to a power that had become to them omnipotent. A few went raving mad. It may surprise you that a body of men, like those you encountered to-day, rough and apparently lawless, should submit to be tyrannized over to this extent; but coarseness of any kind is not necessarily allied to strength of body; and ignorance is opposed to strength of mind, and poverty and hard toil enforce submission if not humility. This was the state of affairs at the mine when John Rycroft was promoted to a higher trust by Mr. Osborne, the proprietor of the mine, who liked him so well as to desire to have him near his person. It astonished me, who knew from the very little he had ever expressed on the subject, that he most indignantly denounced John Rycroft's system, if not himself; and entertained a horror of the whole concern and the stories connected with it, to hear that

Mr. Thorpe, of Moorlands, had accepted the post just vacated by John Rycroft. I never learned from my taciturn friend how he contrived this; but without his aid I think I understood why. Thoughtful and self-sacrificing, and resolute about following up any path of usefulness that seemed open to him, he always acted upon a principle; and as he had given up his early inclination in obedience to his father's command, and resigned his patrimony out of consideration for the life-long habits and prejudices of his sisters, so now he entered upon an occupation and a task that must have been formidable and distasteful to him, with the idea of benefitting others, let what would be the consequence to himself. He persevered, and succeeded in effecting many changes for the better in the management of the mine, and the lot of the miners, who obey him readily, and are, I believe, grateful to him, but who resist all his efforts to raise them out of the mire of their ignorance, so that you will hardly meet with a ruder and more uncultivated set of people than our miners still are, I am sorry to say. Mr. Osborne, as well as Mr. Rycroft, is strongly opposed to any attempt at elevating the social condition of these people, and the unaided efforts of one man, and

he thwarted on all hands, avail nothing. Mr. Rycroft makes his appearance sometimes, as he did to-day, and blusters a good deal, but without producing the old effects ; and Edward's quiet way with everything and everybody, seems to puzzle him a little. But I am only wearying you. In fewer words I ought to have been able to advise you of a weakness of mine, which disinclines me to witness a first interview with Edward Thorpe and any who are wholly unacquainted with his character and position. He is placed at a disadvantage, and is misjudged. His chilled aspirations, and mortified desires, and stunted opportunities, seem ordinarily to form so many fences about him, that render him unapproachable where he is not known ; and really large-hearted as he is on a large scale, he is not ready with the small courtesies that go further than even accredited great deeds towards gaining for a man the liking of his fellows. In fact, the whole argument dwindles to this ludicrously small point—I am jealous for my friend ; knowing what he truly is, I cannot without pain see him set down for what he is not."

"I declare to you very solemnly," said James Fraser, "that this full and generous appreciation of your friend's worth, and solicitude for

its recognition by others, is to me one of the most satisfactory experiences of life that it has been my lot to meet with. In years to come, if I am living, it will refresh me to recal this hour—to think of you and your friend.”

“Mr. Trevor,” said Charles Moore, “you have succeeded in your object, as you deserved to do. I have begun to honour your friend. I am quite curious to see him.”

“Perhaps when you have seen further, and we have all sobered down a little,” said Mr. Trevor, laughing, and slightly embarrassed, “you may perceive that I have given somewhat of an air of romance to very common-place incidents. If you please, we will go on to the mine at once; we shall find him there, I believe, as I saw him there some hours ago, when he said he should not leave until late at night.”

At the mine the two strangers were introduced to Mr. Thorpe. His manner, quiet and undemonstrative; his reception, cold but perfectly frank and civil; his very readiness to oblige, which had something mechanical about it, as if he were himself only a machine fitted to go here or there promptly at any one’s bidding, would have made a decidedly unfavourable impression on Charles Moore if he had not been

otherwise biased as we have shewn. Even as it was, there was evidently some antagonism in the two natures that kept them apart. Mr. Thorpe's personal appearance was equally unattractive, without being decidedly repelling. He was not plain, in the commonest acceptation of the term ; but there were no lights or shadows playing about his countenance, only the perfect immobility that characterizes a face of wax was visible there. His head was fine, and his brow capacious, but there was a dead, sealed look about both ; his eyes rested on you, not unkindly, but they expressed no sympathy and no interest ; and his thin compressed lips could scarcely be supposed to give utterance at any time to other than the slow, methodical speech that harmonized with all the equally-meagre manifestations of his character and organization. Putting him aside presently, and giving all his attention to the mine, which was capacious, and to the workers therein, who were now perfectly respectful, Charles Moore was highly gratified ; carrying away with him, from this first and only scene of the kind he ever witnessed, an impression that remained with him through his after-life.

In these pages we shall not have much further to say respecting that after-life of Charles Moore,

with its haunting memories of which that day's incidents were to form a part ; and little more need be said in this place of the then chief personages with whom he had thus been brought into contact, never to meet with or even hear of them again in this world. Unconsciously to himself, he was faithfully performing a part of his mission upon earth, sowing the good seed that would surely spring up at some future day. Returning to Selby with Mr. Trevor, the friends passed a pleasant evening with that gentleman and his family—his wife, who was hospitable and ladylike ; his eldest daughter, Jane, a fine-grown girl of sixteen ; his son, Lawrence, an intelligent boy of twelve, and his youngest daughter, Lucy, a beautiful child, on whom Charles Moore bestowed the title of “the Fairy.” The conversation turning chiefly on the mine and those connected with it, the two strangers learned more than was sufficient to convince them that their previous impressions respecting Mr. Osborne and his steward, Mr. Rycroft, were correct ; Mr. Trevor being one of those who fully believed the latter to be capable of acting any part that promised to lead to his own aggrandisement. True to his own better instincts, and faithful to his own noble nature, Charles Moore quitted Selby

without seeking any closer acquaintance with his relative, or making known to any the affinity that he did not acknowledge to himself. Such, twenty-five years ago, was the father of the child that was to be born.

CHAPTER III.

OUR story still takes us back twenty-five years. Amongst the impoverished dowagers, superannuated maids of honour, ladies in waiting, and royal governesses who had at that time sought and found an asylum within the walls of Hampton Court Palace, was a certain Honourable Miss de Burgh, who had been maid of honour to Queen Charlotte, long before the close of the last century. This lady, who lived to complete her eightieth year, and who died in full possession of all her faculties, was remarkable for retaining to the end of her days a vivacity and sprightliness of temper and manner that rendered her a pleasant companion even to the young, while her ready conversational powers, her inexhaustible hoard of court gossip, her familiar acquaintance with the past histories of most families of note, and her unquestionably cordial hospitality, proved no less attractive to

the elder personages who readily attended the pleasant and very select reunions, for which she regularly issued cards once a month, even to within a short period of her death. With six or eight apartments, furnished in a stately, old-fashioned style, her pension of four hundred per annum, and some property of her own, that had been considerably augmented within a few years by the bequests of deceased relatives, Miss de Burgh contrived to keep up the dignified and luxurious style of living to which her habits and tastes inclined her ; to be hospitable, as we have said, and benevolent and charitable, whenever any case of difficulty or distress occasioned an appeal to her liberality. Apart from these more prominent traits of character, Miss de Burgh was thoroughly and altogether a gentlewoman ; not an aristocrat merely, but a woman of naturally-refined habits of thought and feeling ; of a lofty spirit, as became one who, appreciating true nobleness, had most loyally adhered through life to the principles of a high honour ; gracious in deed as well as in speech, so that she never placed any under the *burden* of an obligation ; and, above all, possessing the generosity and strength of character that enabled her to make great sacrifices for others promptly and without

a murmur, at a period of life when most persons are incapable of submitting voluntarily to any important and unpalatable change.

To a change of this kind Miss de Burgh submitted on the death of her nephew, Colonel Desborough, the son of her only sister. The Colonel's father died early, after leading a rather dissolute life, and running through his wife's fortune as well as his own; so that, at his death, he had literally nothing left to bequeath in the way of legacy except this wife and son, who were bequeathed, accordingly, to the relations of the former, Captain Desborough possessing none of his own who would or could accept such a charge. Mrs. Desborough soon followed her husband to the grave, and the boy, Philip, was maintained at Eton by his uncle, Lord Otley, the half-brother of Miss de Burgh, who subsequently purchased for him a commission in a regiment about to proceed to India. During his Eton days, and for many years after his arrival in India, young Desborough found in his aunt, Miss de Burgh, the considerate and unfailing friend and benefactress that he really needed, he having all along been made to feel the disadvantage, in many ways, of not possessing means adequate to the proper maintenance

of his position; and being, besides, of a gay, social temper, that led him into extravagances, ending in difficulties that he was generally inclined to keep from the knowledge of his uncle, Lord Otley.

Watching the career of this her favourite nephew with anxiety and tender concern, Miss de Burgh was at length much distressed to learn from a letter, in which he styled himself the happiest of men, and desired her to break the news to his uncle, that he had married an orphan girl, of good family, but portionless, who had been sent out to India under the care of a distant relative. This was clearly the worst folly he could have committed, being then under twenty-two years of age, having no present means of maintaining himself creditably, and no prospects in the future to excuse even partially so ill-advised a step. Miss de Burgh, after shedding a few really heart-wrung tears, lifted her head statelily, as she still had the right to do. Her nephew had committed no crime, and the worst consequences of his indiscretion were sure to fall upon himself. Trying to view the matter in its best aspect—if one better than another could be found—it occurred to her that this untimely taking upon himself of great responsi-

bilities might have the effect of quickening and directing the energies she knew him to possess, and withdraw him from extravagant company, and, perhaps, preserve him from many vices to which others of his rank and profession stooped, without consideration for those belonging to them who might feel keenly the disgrace of which they were insensible themselves. Strengthened by taking this most favourable view of the case, Miss de Burgh wrote a long letter of explanation and extenuation to Lord Otley, who was in an ill humour when he received it, and got into a towering passion before he had finished it, which he left his wife to do, exclaiming, as he flung out of the room, that he would never acknowledge his nephew again.

Lady Otley was at that time young—considerably younger than her lord ; they had already a numerous family, and Lord Otley was not rich. She was herself the youngest daughter of a poor earl, and she had a great horror of the splendid poverty of her class. Unlike her high-minded sister-in-law, she was common-place in character and intellect ; possessing more than an ordinary share of feminine weaknesses and vanity, as some atonement for the absence of anything great in a womanly way ; and to this superstructure she

added a pride of class, and an ambition to be greatest in her sphere, that threw Miss De Burgh's quiet dignity completely in the shade. For a long time she had looked with a jealous eye on young Desborough, as one who was defrauding herself and her children ; and this opportunity of estranging him from his uncle, for ever, was something to be taken advantage of at once. Lord Otley had himself led the way she wished him to take ; and knowing his weaknesses, and that he was likely enough to fall into his sister's views at last, she adroitly set herself about the task of keeping him to his first expressed opinion without allowing any bias of her own to appear, so that he should so stoutly believe he was having his own way that no one could convince him to the contrary. She had tried this course with him before, in less important matters, and had found it to succeed admirably ; for it is a well-known fact that the smallest minds are largely endowed with the low cunning that sharpens the most ordinary wit, and occasionally makes it more than a match for the most brilliant intellect that ever bore witness to the high destinies of man. Lord Otley's intellect was not of the brightest ; but he had a kind heart, and if left to himself would inevi-

tably have taken his nephew into favour again ; but the toils were round him, the decree had gone forth ; and he adhered to his first resolution, painfully, but doggedly, and to the end.

Lady Otley was undeniably a genius in her peculiar line. Keeping her lord, with his outraged dignity and implacable resentment, in the back ground, she contrived to place herself by the side of Miss De Burgh as a strong ally, ready to further the latter's views with respect to her nephew ; ready to lament with her over every failure—the more ready because failure on her own part, as she feelingly said, implied an absence of wifely influence that she would not willingly have made manifest even to the observation of her sister-in-law. The result of all this was a letter from Lord Otley to his nephew, which had the desired effect of producing a complete estrangement on both sides. It had also the better effect of calling into immediate action all the nobler qualities of the individual to whom it was addressed. Philip Desborough justified his aunt's opinion of him by suddenly entering upon a new course of life. To begin with, it was an immense satisfaction to him to feel that he was no longer dependant upon others ; and the entire dependence upon himself and his own

exertions that followed, opened up to him a newer, larger and more hopeful future than he had ventured to dream of while relying more on the exertions of others in his behalf than on any endeavour of his own. For many years even his aunt did not hear from himself; but presently there came tidings of him as a brave and meritorious officer who had so signalised himself in the service of his country as to merit high honour and promotion. Without patronage, the Ensign became a Lieutenant, then Captain, and he attained the rank of Colonel while yet in the prime of his life; Miss De Burgh watching his course from afar, and glorying, as she had a right to do, in the nephew of whose capabilities and better qualities she had always augured well. On the occasion of his last promotion he wrote at length to his aunt, thanking her for the love and care for himself that he had never doubted, and giving her a detailed account of the wife and children whom he had hitherto been able to maintain with honour. Many of their children had died; but of the survivors, Phillip, Clementina and Blanche, he spoke with the fond partiality of a father, and Miss De Burgh took them to her large heart at once. An interval elapsed, and he again wrote to say that the

delicate state of his wife's health rendered it necessary that she should proceed to England ; and as it was not imperative that he should remain in India just then, he intended to return with her. Then came the joyful anticipation of the meeting to Miss De Burgh, who had requested that the Colonel and his family would come at once to her, and remain with her until a suitable abode was found. Then came the meeting itself—and it was not what had been anticipated on either side.

In place of Mrs. Colonel Desborough came a representative, a pale, puny infant two months old, who had been born at sea, and whose mother slept in the great deep. Miss De Burgh took the infant in her arms and sobbed over it before allowing herself to take a full survey of the tall, bronzed, grief-stricken man in whom she would not have recognised the Phillip Desborough who had been absent from his country nearly twenty years. In the eldest child, however, the boy Phillip, then ten years old, she saw his father over again as he had been at that age, and Phillip became an especial favourite with her. When some days had passed, and the emotions consequent on such a meeting had sobered down, it became a question what Colonel Desborough

was to do in his altered circumstances. It was still necessary that he should take a house, and he objected to London. By mere chance young Phillip—his eye having been caught by the name which he had frequently heard mentioned by his father in India—read aloud an advertisement respecting that fine and spacious old mansion and domain known as Stanley Place, and situate in one of the most fertile districts of the county of Worcester, which was to be let and had immediate possession of, the low rent at which it was offered making it worth any tenant's while to venture a small outlay in such few repairs as were necessary in order to make of the Place a first-rate habitation. Stanley Place was an old family mansion of the Desboroughs ; in it the Colonel was born, and his father's extravagance had caused it to pass into other hands. As he afterwards learned, there were many claimants for the property, each disputing the other's right, and after years of litigation, matters remained in the same state ; the old mansion in the meantime remaining uninhabited, and falling into ruin, it seeming to be nobody's business to arrest the progress of the decay going on from year to year. Seeming to be directed to this place by a kind of providence,

the Colonel lost no time in securing it, there being, however, no need for hurry, as few would have been found, especially after an inspection of the place, ready to take it even on the so-called easy terms at which it was offered. Placing Phillip at a school near Hampton Court, and leaving his other children in his aunt's charge, he went down into Worcestershire, in order to ascertain to what extent the house was habitable in its then state. He had been romantic in his boyhood; possessing a large share of the chivalrous feeling, the reverence for established right, and eagerness to emulate the examples of great and good men, that in bygone times had influenced the lives and fortunes of many of his race who had been distinguished in the senate, in the field, and on the scaffold. The romance of his own life was over now; but his heart swelled with the remembrance of old emotions when he first came in sight of the ancient village church within whose walls many of his ancestors slept; and caught a glimpse of the Place, looking older and weather-beaten like himself; its turrets and gable ends scarcely distinguishable in the long-grown ivy; and stood under the shadow of the giant elms on the very spot where he had often paced to and

fro, shaping in the dream-land of the future the kind of pageant, gorgeous and not without renown, that he intended his life to be. Notwithstanding that he found the mansion in even worse condition than he expected, he immediately engaged workmen and others to put in habitable order the apartments he intended to occupy, leaving the larger half of the building to the decay that had seized upon it. In due time he took possession of this old home, accompanied by his three youngest children. His household otherwise consisted of the two English servants who had accompanied him from India; a boy procured in the village; and a middle-aged woman, an old and confidential servant of Miss De Burgh's, who, at the latter's earnest request, and partly because her woman's heart was inclined to the task, consented to take sole charge of the motherless baby. Shortly before the Colonel with his family quitted Hampton Court, the child was christened in Miss De Burgh's private apartment, and was named Avice after her mother and an elder sister who had died.

CHAPTER IV.

LORD OTLEY departed this life two years after Colonel Desborough's return to England, having taken no steps towards a reconciliation with one who was in fact more nearly akin to him than were any of the children given him by Lady Otley. It had appeared remarkably plain to the latter, who was clever at such calculations, that even a Colonel, burdened with a family, and possessing no means beyond his pay, could be scarcely a desirable acquisition as an acquaintance, while as a relative he would almost certainly prove troublesome. In consequence of her ladyship's peculiar opinions, and because there was a large share of dogged determination in Lord Otley's character, it had been impossible to effect a meeting betwixt the uncle and nephew, the latter having also his own reasons for not making a first advance. There had been something too severe in Lord Otley's letter, written

partly at his wife's prompting, which had cut the young man to the soul, while benefiting him to the extent of leading him to rely on his own exertions; and the indignant and never-to-be-forgotten pang of the moment came back whenever he heard his relative mentioned, or any thought connected with him crossed his mind. Added to this, he understood Lady Otley and detested her.

Phillip continued at the school where he had been placed some years, frequently visiting his aunt, who at length, with his father's permission, sent him to Eton. Clementina was also sent to a school; and Blanche, who was always in ill health, received at home such instruction as the village clergyman and the nurse, who was a well-educated woman of her class, could afford her. The Colonel led a quiet, retired life, especially after a reduction in the army occasioned his retirement from active service on half pay. Still in the prime of life, his career seemed to be ended. He had been educated for the army, he had played his part as a soldier, he had won honour and so much pay as enabled him to live; but he had done nothing towards making a provision for his children. Perhaps, if his wife had lived, he might have roused himself once

more, and looked out for some new pursuit ; but as it was, it seemed as if he had made the one great effort of his life, and that there was no further power of effort in him.

And Avice : it was considered a remarkable circumstance by those who had the care of her infancy and girlhood, that she who had given least promise of living on, so that they had scarcely expected to rear her, should eventually prove to possess a stronger constitution than any of the children. Another remarkable circumstance was, that no two persons thought alike of her. There was depth and height enough in Avice to render this diversity of opinion very possible ; and those who fancied they had read her through might not know how very little they comprehended of the nature that seemed altogether revealed to them.

“What is that flitting amongst the trees yonder ?—a figure in white—do you see it ? Now do admit that this old place is haunted, and that for once in our lives we have seen a ghost. How it seems to glide along !”

The speaker was a gentleman on a visit to the Vicar's family. He was returning from taking a moonlight stroll with the latter and his two daughters, being the suitor of one of them.

“I am compelled to spoil your little romance,” said the Vicar. “That is Miss Avice, the Colonel’s youngest daughter. She likes these rambles by herself, especially at night, and I often wonder, what the poor child’s thoughts are running upon whilst wandering about in this solitary way. She is very close ; and though I have had a deal to do with her education, I never could make much of her. Wholesome restraint, such as she has never had, might have done good ; but I don’t think she has much capacity.”

“I wonder that she isn’t frightened walking alone, sometimes when it is quite dark, amongst those old trees and ruins,” said Miss Sarah, the intended bride. “I know I should be, but she does all sorts of odd things. She has a key of one of the church doors, and she’ll go in quite late at night and sit by the hour together on an old crumbling monument erected to the memory of some knight who was killed in the crusades. The knight is one of her ancestors. Then Mrs. Ritson tells us that at all hours of the night she’ll ramble about the long galleries and state rooms that have been shut up for years ; and she’ll climb to the top of one of the turrets that is farthest from the part of the house where they live, and sit half the night in company with

a white owl that has taken up its abode in the ivy. The servants say they have heard her and the owl talking together."

"A romantic young lady—I see," said the gentleman, pulling up his shirt collar, and speaking with the air of one who perfectly understood romantic young ladies.

"There is something very heathenish in all this, and very much to be deplored, *I think*," said Miss Iredale, who was elderly and very demonstratively pious. "I am sorry to be compelled to declare that, so far as I can understand, Miss Avice is altogether unregenerate. I have frequently spoken to her on religious subjects, especially on her own lost state, but she never seemed to understand me, and could not disguise her distaste for what I said. I have watched her in church, and I assure, you, Mr. Morley, that papa's discourses always tire her to death."

"I have not a doubt of it," said Mr. Morley. There was no irony in this reply. It was the candidly-expressed opinion of one common-place and narrow-minded individual to another.

"You would not say that Miss Avice was mopish and spiritless, if you knew her," said Mrs. Ritson, in reply to some observations by a lady visitor. "She has a high spirit and a gay

heart, and you won't often see her idle, for she reads no end of books. You should see how her face brightens up when Mr. Phillip comes here. On those occasions she is half wild with joy. She and Mr. Phillip love one another dearly, and I believe they understand each other as no one else does. Miss Avice no spirit! Why, she's quite untameable, and almost frightens me to death with her wild, reckless ways sometimes. She'll ride horses that no one else dare take in hand, and compel them to obey her too. I've seen her and Mr. Phillip dash along at such a rate they seemed to be flying. Mr. Phillip encourages her in all her ways, and they're always rambling out together when he's here. I'm sure it's wonderful to me that's she's grown up so strong, considering what a poor, sickly little thing she was; but I never knew her ever catch a cold, though she has come home hundreds of times drenched through with rain. Miss Clementina dare not put a foot out of doors when it is wet; and you see what a poor creature Miss Blanche is, ma'am. Yes; I assure you it's Miss Avice being in such high spirits nearly all along that makes her appear a little down now and then. Such excitement couldn't last; and I've known

her burst into tears all of a sudden for no reason that she knows of. *I* know very well that it is just because she has exhausted herself. You'll say that she has her faults, ma'am ; but she's a dear, affectionate child, and a naturally pious child, too. I never heard anyone speak so beautifully about God and all his wonderful works as she does sometimes."

"What a bright, rejoicing creature that youngest daughter of yours is, Desborough," said an old brother officer who had passed a few days at the Place. "It is quite infectious to be near her. She at least is free from the thought and care for the future that burden you. I'll warrant she thinks that there is no such thing as sorrow in the world. Well, well, it should be so : the knowledge will come soon enough."

"You have not read *Avice* right," said the Colonel. "She is now what she always has been—a thoughtful, melancholy child. Feeling everything intensely, joy as well as sorrow, she is happy enough at times ; but I, who have watched her closely, can detect even when her face is radiant with pleasurable excitement as you saw it just now, traces of some mysterious sadness lying in the very depths of her nature. *Avice* was a child of sorrow ; and I have always

been haunted by a thought that her life would be sorrowful. I declare to you that my weakness on this point, if it be a weakness, is unconquerable. It always makes my heart ache to look in Avice's face. Ever for me is written there one indelible word—pain. This is the keynote to her character, which once given, you may go on. I go on and find that I had learned all at the beginning. Pain, pain is the everlasting theme. Whenever Avice is called upon to suffer greatly, she will bear herself as one who knows that suffering must be."

No one knew better than Avice herself how much of a stranger she was to all around her—all except her brother Phillip. Her father could sympathise with her romantic love for the old days over which the spirit of chivalry has thrown a brightness still dazzling to those who are more ready to recognise good than evil; with her admiration of heroism and greatness of life and character; with her reverence for the venerable, and with the pride of race that stimulated both to nobleness of life; but he went with her no further, and left her on the confines of a grand creation whose glories seemed to be fully revealed to her alone. Even Phillip did not enter into all the secrets of her poetic and artistic

temperament ; but his nature was sufficiently in harmony with hers to enable him to follow her lead ; to recognise at a distance the beauty and sublimity, the thrilling harmony, and unspeakable loveliness, and stern grandeur, and mysterious solemnity in the midst of which Avice lived, fascinated, yet awed ; thrilled with rapture, yet oppressed ;—one mortal called out of a thousand to bear the burden that this fullest revelation of the immortal life must ever be to any yet clothed with the flesh. And Phillip, when at Cambridge, and afterwards whilst studying for the bar, took great delight in these visits to Stanley Place, these communings with Avice, that always left him happier and better than he was before—braver and more hopeful—more ardently in love with truth and goodness—more keenly alive to the beautiful—more patient with, if not more thankful for, the labour and the chance of success that sometimes seemed to lie like two dreary, impassable wastes betwixt him and the profession to which he aspired without having chosen it. His very love for Avice, growing upon him as her nature was gradually unfolded to him, stimulated him to exertion more than anything else could ; for, while feeling that few would ever understand her, he was

proud of her, and eager to make his own arm strong, that it might afford her such stay as she would need. These two, therefore, became a necessity to each other, while Clementina and Blanche stood aloof, and not together.

Avice was in her sixteenth, and Phillip in his twenty-sixth year, when Colonel Desborough died, suddenly many thought, but in fact after a long and perceptible decay. Avice, especially quick where her affections were concerned, recognised the shadow of death while it was yet afar off, so that she was the first to be visited by the grief that was inevitable upon the loss of one for whom each grieved after his or her own fashion. Her foresight enabled her to be a great stay to her father, who understood his child better during the purifying process that his own spirit underwent from day to day until the end came. True to the type of character to which she belonged before aspiring to emulate it, Avice bore great sorrow with fortitude, and looked with high hope, and trust, and strong faith to that world beyond the grave, which already contained for her objects as familiar as were any in the world around her. During the many years of his retirement, Colonel Desborough had died out of the recollection of most

of the persons with whom he had been intimate at different periods of his career, and his death did not cause any sensation in what is called the great world. Lady Otley was troubled because, for decency's sake, her family was compelled to put on mourning; and because, for particular reasons of her own, she would have been better satisfied if the Colonel had outlived Miss de Burgh. There was a child-like simplicity and an absence of distrust about the latter, not common except to minds of the higher order, of which Lady Otley took bold advantage, feeling herself to be immeasurably her sister-in-law's superior, by virtue of the low cunning which constant use had brought to such perfection as it might reach. After Lord Otley's death there seemed to be no further excuse for Lady Otley keeping aloof from the Colonel and his family, especially as she had all along given Miss de Burgh to understand that the estrangement grieved her. Her ready wit got her out of this dilemma in a very seeming natural way. Planning with Miss de Burgh a meeting with the Colonel which was unexpected on his part, she contrived to let him know in a most unmistakeable manner, while at the same time gaining credit for her cordiality with Miss de Burgh as a mere

looker-on, that the old feeling of animosity was yet in full force, and that any close intimacy was impossible. She understood enough of the Colonel's character to lead to the belief that, seeing through her manœuvres as he certainly would, he would maintain a dignified silence, and dismiss the whole matter with the proud scorn of which she might afterwards complain with safety. Everything answering to her wish, she was afforded the opportunity of lamenting to Miss de Burgh the evident implacability of Colonel Desborough, which would necessarily deprive her of the pleasure of frequently seeing his children; and when Miss de Burgh remonstrated with the Colonel, the smile and shrug of contempt, or briefly expressed dislike of the subject with which she was invariably met, induced her very soon to give up her attempt, though with sorrow, her good taste and gentlewomanly feeling not allowing her to interfere beyond a certain point. In this and many similar ways Lady Otley contrived to place herself in a favourable light before Miss de Burgh, whose favour, if some promising circumstances went on well, might prove of great advantage to herself and family. Apart from this interested motive, no consideration whatever

would have induced Lady Otley to be at the trouble of propitiating the good will of Miss de Burgh, who possessed no influence in the fashionable world of the day, and who personally was regarded by her as the greatest of bores. Decidedly attached to Colonel Desborough and his children as she evidently was, it would not have been worth Lady Otley's while to expend time and talent for the purpose of blinding and cajoling her, if, old as she was, there had not been a prospect of her living to inherit a property so considerable that it would bear dividing. The great chance upon which Lady Otley speculated, and which remained to Miss de Burgh when on the verge of her eightieth year, was this:—A certain Mr. Vernon, a wealthy old bachelor, possessing no near connections of his own, who had aspired to Miss de Burgh's hand in her young days, and who still hung about her, superannuated admirer as he was, had made it pretty generally known in certain circles that, in case of Miss de Burgh surviving him, she would inherit his immense wealth.

As for many years past the old gentleman's personal habits had been penurious, and as he was known to have a passion for speculating cautiously, and to be adding by this means almost daily to

his wealth, the amount of his actual possessions was supposed to be enormous ; and Lady Otley, who betwixt her ambition, her small income, and her four unmarried daughters, was frequently at her wit's end, would have descended to anything however base and mean, in order to keep on good terms with the possible inheritor of this fortune bordering on the fabulous. Still there was the possibility of Miss de Burgh dying before her antiquated lover ; though she was hale and active, and to all appearance gave promise of being the longest liver ; but with such a possibility before her eyes she did not feel herself at liberty to cultivate any closer acquaintance with the Desboroughs, the four young people, who at their father's death were thrown upon the world penniless. It was found to be true that the Colonel had never been able to save anything ; and much commiseration was expressed for his family by distant relations and others who could fall back upon the comfortable consciousness that nothing more could be required from themselves. The willing heart and hand, as is usual in such cases, alone came forward to be useful ; and these were found in Miss de Burgh.

Since leaving school, Clementina had resided with her almost altogether ; and now Blanche

and Avice found a home with her, and she received back with much affection her old servant, Ritson. In order to meet these new claims upon her, she gave up her one-horse carriage, thenceforward becoming a prisoner, as she could not walk; and dismissed her man-servant; and in sundry ways curtailed the expenses of her household. When all had settled down into apparent quiet, the future looked dreary enough to the many anxious hearts thus brought together for the last time.

Phillip had yet a year of his time to serve. Industrious as he was, and earnestly desirous of finding himself in a position to help his sisters, and also to lessen the burden upon his aunt, whom he honoured with his whole soul, he laboured under the disadvantage of not having the liking for his profession, or confidence in his own fitness for it, that would have called forth all his energies, and given the impulse of conscious power and ambitious hope to what was now a dreary task. He had wished to enter the army, but Colonel Desborough, though himself what may be termed a successful soldier, had objected so strongly to the profession for his son, that Phillip gave way, and submitted without a murmur to the hard up-hill work that studying

for the bar proved to him. Clementina, a town-bred, boarding-school young lady, who had a great deal of her aunt Otley's worldly foresight about her, suffered least, as she deserved to do, not being at any time in the habit of looking beyond self. She had detested Stanley Place and the neighbourhood ; never ceasing to rail against the dismalness of the one and the stupidity of the other during the visits that were to her a sort of martyrdom, and no gratification to those before whom her selfish nature and unamiable temper were freely displayed. Her father's serious, melancholy character, which had so tended to endear him to Avice, was decidedly distasteful to her, she having no weaknesses on the side of sensibility or tenderness ; and of Avice she was inclined to be ashamed, not being able to discover in her any one accomplishment or notion that could fit her for polished society. Long before her father's death, Clementina had begun to consider what were her own chances for rising in the world, as she determined to do by any means that offered. Living almost entirely with Miss de Burgh for some years, she frequently met Lady Otley, and liked her, and studied her tactics, and admired them ; and soon felt convinced that in order to get on in the world

and keep well with it, she could not do better than copy Lady Otley as far as she understood her. Every one for himself. "Lady Otley is quite right in keeping her poor relations at a distance," said Clementina to herself: "if I was rich I should do just the same." It was curious to see how she could command her temper and otherwise display herself to the best advantage before those with whom it was her interest to keep well. She was generally considered to be very amiable, and was much liked amongst the numerous families with which she had become acquainted through her former schoolfellows. Clementina never let slip any chance of gaining an introduction to the kind of society she wished to move in; and no one knew better than herself that high birth and connections are valued even more than money at a certain distance down the scale. Men were known to marry for connection, and a certain lieutenant, of whose regiment Lord Otley was commanding officer, had paid very particular attentions to Miss Desborough, the source of which she believed she understood, and which she did not altogether discourage, reserving the chance in case nothing better offered. She did not tell Lieutenant Renshaw that she had never seen her cousin Lord Otley except

once in her life, when he did not speak to her ; and she knew very well that if he married her he would be disappointed. But if it suited herself that the marriage should take place, no consideration of this kind could make her hesitate ; and it was not improbable that Lord Otley would consider it expedient to use his influence for the lieutenant, as her husband, if only as a means of getting both out of his way. There was this chance for Clementina, and the risk of losing it by waiting too long : until her Aunt de Burgh died, for instance ; when the wide gulf that lay betwixt the Desboroughs and the Otleys would be made visible to all. Her cares were of this kind ; like such feelings as she possessed lying on the surface of a nature that had no depths. Only earnest as a schemer, her capabilities of that kind had free play, no thought for others having the power to disturb her for a moment.

Avice, with her large heart and soul, lived a fuller and nobler life. Her heroic nature forbade her being utterly cast down by calamity ; and as yet she had not been called upon to blush for any of her race. Pride and joy, and unsatisfied love, and deep sorrow, by turns thrilled through every nerve of her being while brooding over the memory of the father she had lost—his dis-

tinguished career as a soldier ; his unblemished honour as a man ; his faithfulness and loving-kindness ; his enthusiasm so readily kindled like her own by whatever was good or noble ; his inevitable melancholy and patient decay ; his death gentle and full of hope, and only saddened by the thought of those he was leaving behind him. In her own way, Avice had many sources of consolation. It was matter of congratulation to her that her father had been allowed to lay down his head in the final resting-place that he would himself have chosen above all others, and for which he would have pined if it had been his lot to die in a distant land. In Stanley Church lay his mother and many of his kindred ; and there lay the first man of his race distinguished upon British soil ;—the noble knight who had followed Richard to the crusades, and won the love of his master ; and died bravely, bequeathing the care of his family to that master, who fulfilled the trust nobly—as he could. Avice, like her father, first grew into an unalienable and yearning attachment to the old church at Stanley through a reverence for the memory of this early ancestor by whose tomb both had lingered in childhood, dreaming dreams of by-gone days from which all the dross dropped unseen when

viewed by vivid imaginations, and divined by pure, brave hearts. Stanley Place was no longer a home for Avice; but Stanley Church was a resting-place on the way Home, to which she felt that her heart would turn, however her life might be prolonged, or wherever it might come to a close.

It was also a great consolation to Avice that the changes which she lamented had brought her into closer contact and companionship with her Aunt de Burgh, whom she had always loved and honoured greatly. Very vivid were the young girl's recollections of the stately old lady, who had never failed in her yearly visits to the Place, which always lasted exactly a month, and who had always understood her, and sympathised with her, as no one, except her father and her brother, could. It was a pleasure, too, and a novelty to Avice, to be brought all at once, as it were, into the society of the high-bred if somewhat stiff personages, who flocked to her aunt's reunions, and hovered about her at all times. The outward polish of manner, the courtesy of these people, made her feel at home in their company; and her imagination was ready to supply what she found wanting in themselves; her ignorance of meanness and insincerity, conceit and pretension, and numerous other

small traits of individual character that go largely towards impoverishing and degrading the life we live, leading her to seek in others only the higher qualities with which she was familiar, and to which all prefer a claim that looks more or less imposing on the surface.

Avice's imagination, indeed, was ready enough to supply many wants that were glaringly apparent and ever-present to others. She had no idea of poverty as the great, down-dragging, soul-and-body-crushing power that it is; and as far as the mere money value of the service went, she accepted her aunt's protection without being at all aware that an obligation or a difficulty had been incurred on either side. With all her imagination, Avice could not conceive a situation in which loss of fortune and extreme privation—such as was endured by Henrietta Maria, for instance, the daughter, sister, and wife of a king—could take from any the high privileges with which God had endowed them; the proud consciousness of their birth-right—the power to act greatly and nobly as they stood. And she was so far right. But Avice needed a more extended knowledge of the world, in order to play her part well.

Blanche—we have mentioned Blanche casually,

because others only thought of her in the same way—was just one more human being present in the flesh, and to be provided for, and nothing else. In every visible part of her—her face, hands, and neck—she was white as snow, and as cold. No degree of summer heat ever seemed to impart warmth to her, as she sat shivering in any remote corner that offered, bending over an everlasting piece of embroidery work. Blanche never read books ; never expressed any interest in the life about her ; never conversed when she could help it. Her father's death had left her colder and whiter than before ; but this added pallor and chill were the only indications of her having felt his loss. So undemonstrative was she, so completely encased in some icy immovability and silence, that few ever made a second attempt to become better acquainted with her, contenting themselves with marvelling at her colourless face and monotonous occupation from a distance.

It was remarkable that Blanche had been a particularly healthy, cheerful child up to the time that her family had embarked for England, and that she had fallen into her present state immediately after her mother's death, as if some especial blight over and above the loss of her

best friend, had then fallen upon the child. Even Avice, ready to sympathise as she was, had never been able so far to penetrate her sister's nature as would have allowed her to understand to what extent the moral and intellectual faculties were also frozen and inert. It added to the strangeness of her isolation in the midst of life, that Blanche was not an invalid in any understood sense of the term ; that, beyond her pallor and her perpetual shivering fits, she had no ailment, but ate and slept well, and had no changes for the worse, if she never shewed any sign of amendment. Blanche, therefore, as we have said, was just one more human being to be provided for ; a something that could not be reckoned as anything in any other way.

Lady Otley's visits to Miss de Burgh became much less frequent, after the influx of the whole Desborough family ; but, at the same time, her expressions of interest in their welfare were, if possible, warmer ; and she lamented continually her own inability to do for them what she wished. While speaking on this subject, she always studiously kept her son, Lord Otley, out of sight ; and as he was no favourite with Miss de Burgh, whom he never thought it worth his while to visit, his mother's avoidance of all

mention of him might be considered a matter of good taste. Regarding her own embarrassed circumstances, Lady Otley had generally some hard fact to relate, that went far towards proving that she was by no means in a condition to help others. Miss de Burgh, with her own knowledge of court life, found it quite impossible to calculate the expense of maintaining four grown-up daughters, who ranked amongst the gayest members of the fashionable world; and she really commiserated Lady Otley, and would have helped her further if she could. Indeed, she had helped her on more than one occasion of a great emergency occurring, and Lady Otley was indebted to Miss de Burgh to a considerable amount—the latter very quietly allowing the debt to remain, feeling quite satisfied (pity and forgive her, reader !) that, in the event of her own death, the principal and interest would be paid over, as had been agreed upon, to her nephew and nieces, the Desboroughs.

Amongst the consolations that Avice found in her great sorrow, one of the chief was being near Phillip. Phillip possessed an amount of animal spirits that no trouble could keep down long; and it was a fact, acknowledged by every one in some way, that even the old palace itself

looked more juvenile and cheerful on the days when Phillip brightened it with his presence, and shed the sunshine of his own genial nature over all with whom he came in contact. To Avice, with her own fulness of life and earnestness, there was something glorious, worth living for of itself, in a meeting of this kind with her brother—in the first cordial embrace and kiss ; in the glowing look, full of pleasure and encouragement—in the cheerful tones, that made her heart throb with the eagerness of its happiness—in the whole manly presence that was a pride and a joy to her, and an assurance of protection that was complete. What would Avice be without Phillip ? Such a question could not have occurred to her ; it would have been too extravagant and out of the way—something like wondering what this universe would be without the sun.

CHAPTER V.

THAT particular portion of Hampton Court Palace which contained Miss de Burgh's household was, one sunny morning, thrown into commotion by the unexpected appearance of Phillip, who had come, as he said, with the express purpose of running away with Avice. Years ago, down at Stanley Place, he had described to her his attic in the Temple; and having made her acquainted, as well as he could, with the aspect of the place and its situation, and his own contrivances for convenience and comfort, it was natural enough that two such persons should fall into conversation about the various celebrated individuals who, at different periods, had been connected with the Temple, going back to the founders, and the times during which their order flourished and held rule there. These associations of departed zeal, and power, and

magnificence—of genius, that out of its own wealth and abundance of life, bequeaths an undying interest to whatever spot of earth has been hallowed by its presence, rendered the Temple to Avice one of the many charmed old places that she longed to ramble over and inspect for herself; and Phillip promised to find or make the opportunity of gratifying her. Avice had been six months at Hampton Court, and the subject had not been renewed between them. * So Phillip appeared one day unexpectedly, as we have said, and announced his intention to redeem the above promise, thinking it best to make a surprise of the pleasure at last.

“What is all this about Avice visiting the Temple?” asked Miss de Burgh, the last to hear of the arrangement that had been made. “I do not exactly understand.”

Phillip explained about the interest Avice felt in the place, and the promise he had formerly given her.

“Well, I see no decided objection,” said Miss de Burgh. “Mine is only a dull house for a young girl, and the ride out, of itself will do Avice good. My dear boy, if I had a conveyance of my own, I should come to see you often, and bring the girls with me. I only wish I had known of this

intention beforehand, as I am sure Lady Kenneth would gladly have offered you seats in her carriage. She went to town a few days ago, and goes again to-morrow. It would have been better so, than travelling by the stage-coach."

"As far as Avice and I are concerned, we shall prefer the latter conveyance," said Phillip. "Lady Kenneth is so deaf that it is impossible to make her hear, and yet she expects you to talk to her incessantly. I hope, my dear aunt, that you have no decided objection to a stage-coach. I have certainly done wrong in making this arrangement without your knowledge."

"My aunt knows very well that travelling so short a distance by a common conveyance is the height of vulgarity," said Miss Desborough.

"Perhaps the quintessence of vulgarity is an over-readiness to detect what is vulgar," said Phillip, speaking with an asperity that seemed strange to him. "You have declined to accompany us, Clementina, and may feel satisfied that you have yourself done right."

"Your brother is the head of the family, Miss Desborough," said Miss de Burgh, speaking with dignity; "and I would not take upon me to dispute what seems right to him, that not being wrong in itself."

“My dear, kind aunt,” said Phillip, taking her withered hand and pressing it to his lips, “a pretty head of the family I am, certainly! A poor dependant on your bounty, I have not, so far, been able to earn a penny for myself! But this state of things will not last long; I trust soon to be working in earnest.”

It was a fact, and Phillip knew it, and had been deeply touched by it, that Miss de Burgh had paid him great deference since his father's death. The high-minded old lady acted spontaneously up to her notions of what was right: she had principles, and adhered to them. “Honour where honour is due.”

“Your not having done better has been the fault of circumstances,” said Miss de Burgh. “You are the first Desborough that was ever so situated, but not the less honourable on that account. It is singular that, just before you came in, I was thinking of writing to you, to say that I wanted to have a long conversation with you. There are some important matters, on which it is necessary that we should speak together.”

She glanced round the room as she spoke, as if to assure herself that they two were alone. Clementina had flung out of the room, to Phillip's

great relief ; Avice had already gone to prepare herself for her journey ; Blanche alone remained, shivering in the accustomed corner, and bending over her work—Blanche reckoned as nobody with everybody ; and Miss de Burgh, satisfied with her survey, went on.

“ It is quite proper, my dear Phillip, that you should understand exactly what my circumstances are, which you do not at present, nor any one else, I believe, except Lady Otley”—(she could not add, not being aware of the fact herself, that the latter had dragged the knowledge out of her)—“ and that you should know how your sisters will be placed at my death. I have arrived at a great age, nearly eighty, and should not expect to live long, though, so far, I am thankful to say, I have enjoyed good health. I do yet hope that I shall live to see you rising in your profession ; but there is no telling what may happen in a very brief space of time. I have been thinking that what I have to say to you had better be said at once.”

“ As you like, aunt,” said Phillip. “ When I return with Avice, I can remain all night, if you think proper. I have also been wishing for an opportunity of speaking with you, for I have a little encouraging news to communicate with

regard to myself. You have heard of Mr. Sergeant Brough, the great barrister? Well, young Osborne kindly got me introduced to him, and I have met him since several times, and he seems to have taken a sort of fancy to me—through something that Osborne has said to him, I dare say. He positively said to me, aunt, that when I entered the profession, he should be happy to give me all the help in his power. Only consider how greatly it will be in his power to help me!”

“That is well, very well; I am glad to hear it, Phillip. It pleases me, too, that you are on such friendly terms with Walter Osborne; not because he is likely to become one of the wealthiest men in England, but because I really think highly of him, though I only know him from report. Ah, Phillip, the possessor of a good name, if he deserves it, is the only truly great man! Young Osborne’s father, if all that is said of him be true, is neither fit to live nor die. But I am wandering from what I wished to say. Don’t trouble the poor darling; she likes best to be left to herself.”

This was said in reference to Blanche, by whose side Phillip had just seated himself. Phillip and Avice had made wonderful discoveries

by gazing in Blanche's deep, solemn eyes ; and neither allowed that her heart and intellect were so numb, frozen, half dead, as others believed. With one hand placed caressingly on the very dark, glossy hair, that contrasted so strongly with the pearly whiteness of her complexion, he was in the act of bending down to look in those eyes, when Miss de Burgh spoke. His own eyes were suffused with tears when he drew himself up ; and gently removing his hand from the bowed head, he folded his arms, and awaited in silence what his aunt had further to say.

“ I don't know how it is,” continued Miss de Burgh, “ but there seems to be a certain melancholy about us to-day—about you and me, I mean, Phillip. Well, we both have matter for serious thought : you are just entering upon life ; I am about to leave it. Of course, I cannot say just now all I wish to say. This is Thursday : I think you had better come on Saturday, and remain Sunday over with us, though this is not what you call your Sunday out. That will do very well. It is true, Phillip, that I feel uneasy—dissatisfied in my own mind respecting some matters that you will understand better than I do. The fact is, I have at various times lent rather large sums of money to a certain

person, and I have not in return received any acknowledgment of the debt. Now, I know this person to be perfectly honourable, and that everything is safe so long as she lives ; and she is quite likely to live. You understand ?”

“ Only that you are altogether wrong, aunt,” said Phillip. “ In such a case I would not trust to any one’s honour : no man’s or woman’s word of honour is sufficient security in a matter of that kind.”

“ O Phillip, what are these sentiments that you are uttering ?”

“ Common sense,” said Phillip. “ The laws of our land are grounded upon common sense, though much extraneous and cumbrous matter leads superficial people to believe otherwise. Such a mode of transacting important business as that you speak of, is a wrong and an injustice to both parties ;—to the lender who is placed in danger, and to the borrower who might become a defaulter without intending it. Do not in such a matter reckon upon duration of life. I might be dead to-morrow.”

“ What a thought ! pray hush ! You oppress me to-day, Phillip.”

“ I dare say my being a lawyer had something to do with my utterance of that thought,” said

Phillip smiling, but with a soberness of manner that amounted to melancholy with him. "However, I will give you my opinion more at large in a day or two, and in the meantime make yourself quite happy, dear aunt; we will have everything put right: and here comes Avice."

Avice entered with the richly beautiful expression on her face—a very sunshine of the soul—that always broke forth when her nature was stirred to any one of its many depths. Phillip could not help involuntarily glancing from her to Blanche again, and the contrast betwixt the two struck him more forcibly than it had ever done before. And more vividly than in past days, came upon him just then the well-remembered scenes of his mother's death and solemn burial; even to the most trivial details that could at the time have been taken cognisance of by any of the senses; all coming back to him as if the whole were being acted over again. And deep, deeper down in his heart of hearts, was stirred the thought that had often brooded there, the thought how these two had strangely come to life and a sort of death in the self-same hour, and through the agency of the same event—the passing of their mother into eternity. Phillip involuntarily put his hand to his head as he rose

up, feeling oppressed by the many remembrances and emotions that crowded upon him all at once. He bent down to Blanche again and kissed her cheek. Avice came forward, and, as was her wont, knelt before her sister, taking her hands in her own and looking up in her face.

“Good bye, Blanche, dear,” she said. “I shall be back soon, and then you will hear me relate all my adventures. Good bye!”

Blanche said “Good bye,” and smiled. It was a kind, even cheerful, yet wintry sort of smile, with no more warmth in it than might be found in a December sun-beam lying on a waste of snow. But the eyes!—there was still that something in the eyes!

“My sweet aunt!” said Phillip, kissing her on the forehead while he held her hand in both his own. He uttered no other word, and went out immediately with Avice. The speech, and tone, and action had been sufficiently loving; but his leave-taking altogether struck Miss de Burgh as being abrupt—wanting completeness. It reminded her of a broken column, as an emblem of life struck down in its strength. She wept without knowing why, and wished the day would come to a close.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT in the bright, early sunshine of a glorious September day ; and with Avice, who had never seen London, and who ought to see everything worth seeing ; whirling along in a coach that was bearing her and himself to that greatest metropolis in the world, Phillip was himself again. He was capable of feeling in all its intenseness that one intensest of pleasures—the consciousness of being about to minister out of the heights and depths of our own enthusiasm to the gratification of another, whose sympathies are as ardent, and whose experiences are fresher than our own. He had quite made up his mind that it was to be a glorious day to Avice and himself. The coach by which they journeyed started from Hampton Court at eleven o'clock in the morning, and that by which they would return left London at eight in the evening, so that they had eight good hours before them. In

order to keep a check upon his own impulsiveness, and set at defiance the temptations that he knew would beset him, urging him to make impossible attempts at showing Avice everything in one day ; Phillip had drawn up a kind of programme of the day's proceedings, by which he was determined to abide. According to this arrangement he and Avice were to walk from the coach office to the Temple, taking St. James's Park in their way, and mounting at once to his attic to partake of the refreshment of a glass of wine and a biscuit during the half hour that a thorough examination of that often-described domicile would occupy. Then a few hours would be devoted to the Temple itself, and to a stroll in the gardens ; after which they would return to Phillip's rooms and find a dinner prepared for them as if by enchantment. That would occupy another hour, and bring them to about four o'clock in the afternoon. The next move was to be the crowning glory of the day ; another surprise for Avice that Phillip knew would drive her half wild with delight. He was to bear her off in a coach, making a mystery of their destination, until on their alighting, he uttered the magic words—" Westminster Abbey, Avice." Westminster Abbey ! Avice had been talking about it all her life ; craving to see that one

noble old building above all others, and she would understand from this act how much Phillip had sympathised with her. He had imagined to himself the sudden breaking forth of the surprise and joy, and gratitude that would perfectly flood Avice's face with a very glory of light. Perhaps he had excited himself too much with these eager anticipations of gratifying Avice to the utmost of his power ; perhaps he had not been quite his old self in the morning to begin with, as Miss de Burgh had thought. At all events, he was sensible even in the early part of the day of an oppression, a feverish uneasiness, a heaviness, especially in his head, against which he fought manfully, too much absorbed with Avice to admit of thought for himself. And Avice's exhilaration of spirits, the delighted interest she took in all she saw, repaid his kind thought for her, and helped to bear him up. Still he bore up with an effort ; and on returning to his rooms, after rambling over the Temple, he felt that he could not conceal his indisposition from Avice, as he could not partake of the dinner that had been made ready to the minute according to his order. Avice, who had not noticed anything wrong about him, as he took care she should not till there was no help for it,

uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure on seeing what preparation had been made. The centre table was spread for dinner ; and immediately on their appearance, a decent looking man who carried a napkin on his arm whisked off the covers of three steaming hot dishes, containing respectively a nicely roasted fowl, an excellent beefsteak, and vegetables. On a side table stood a tart that looked to Avice as delicious as it would have done to a child half her age, and some cheese.

“ O how delightful this is !” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together in the very fulness of her glee. “ A dinner in the Temple ! how it makes one feel at home in the old place ! I could almost fancy I was here by right of descent from some of those old Knights Templers who must have had many a carouse in these walls. How happy you must be here, Phillip.”

“ I feel that I ought to be very happy just now,” said Phillip, sinking wearily into an easy chair as he spoke, “ but every day is not like this with me, Avice.”

“ Ah ! I should be happy every day, living here, and with you, Phillip ! But you seem tired. Are you tired ? I see,” she continued, tossing aside her bonnet and shawl, and seating

herself at the table, "that I shall be compelled to exert myself. I will carve this fowl. What do you take first, Phillip?"

Phillip did not reply for a few seconds, during which he had a fierce struggle with the oppression that lay on him. At the moment he rebelled against being thus beaten down on the only really happy day that he had known during his residence in the Temple.

"I wish I was not compelled to declare, Avice," he said, "that I have no appetite—that I have a strong inclination to doze in this chair. It is nothing—it will pass off presently; and you, Avice, get your dinner and don't mind me. Now I should like to see how you carve that fowl.—I don't believe you know how to carve."

Avice was at his side, bending over him.

"But are you really ill, Phillip?" she said anxiously. "Come, you are only tired; eat something and you will feel better."

"I would if I could," said Phillip, "but I am beaten just now. You don't know how it would please me, Avice, to see you seated comfortably at your dinner. Perhaps by the time you have finished I shall be able to astonish you with my appetite."

Avice obeyed him, as she was accustomed to

do ; and was glad that she had an appetite, because she knew that it would please him to see her eat. Not apprehending anything serious, she chatted gaily during the meal, Phillip replying to her as well as he could. When she had finished, he was still unable to partake of anything ; and Avice began to feel really uncomfortable, when the table was cleared and Phillip seemed still unable to leave the chair, where he sat moving about restlessly.

“It’s all my confounded head,” said Phillip. “I am at length compelled to confess that it is the weakest part about me. I say, John,” addressing the waiter, who was just disappearing for the last time, “be good enough to tell Mrs. Rae that I want to speak with her. Thank you. A very quiet, civil fellow that, Avice. I have often wondered, having seen him often, whether in all his life, and you see that he is middle-aged, he has ever done anything except appear at the bidding of any stranger who may have occasion to summon him, and then disappear, to what unknown region none may tell. He seems to lead a migratory sort of life, that forbids one supposing that in all this wide world there is such a thing as a home for him. And yet, perhaps, he has a home, filled with loving

hearts. This is a strange world, Avice—a strange world within a world is this of London, where people jostle against each other, and enter into earnest communion on business matters together, yet rarely meet under circumstances favourable to an interchange of sympathy betwixt man and man. I hope I am not talking nonsense, Avice; for my head is light, or heavy, I scarcely know which. Ah! Mrs. Rae, come forward. This is my sister, Mrs. Rae.”

Mrs. Rae, who was beyond middle age, and common-place in appearance, and who wore a black silk bonnet shaped very much like a coal-scuttle, and had a general look about her of being very much *not* at home, glanced at Avice and curtsied.

“I sent for you, Mrs. Rae,” continued Phillip, “because I want a little advice, and have a general idea that you are clever at most things. Whenever I have a cold, Avice, or scald myself while making my own tea, as I do very often, or partially succeed in cutting off one of my fingers, which I do pretty often too, I always call in Mrs. Rae, who is always ready with her remedy that never fails. I don’t know what is the matter with me to-day, Mrs. Rae. This is altogether a new case. Something is the matter with my

head ; and, you know, when the head is affected, the whole system is out of order. It is not a common head-ache, though I have much pain, and I feel altogether in an irritable, restless state. I want propping up at once, Mrs. Rae, so pray tell me what I am to do."

"You look very much flushed and red about the eyes, too, sir," said Mrs. Rae. "I don't like for to trifle with anything out of a common way, myself, and I do wish you had my sister here instead of me. She's been a regular nurse in the hospitals, sir, since her husband died, and she knows something about most complaints. But I do think, sir, you'd best send for a doctor at once."

"A doctor !" exclaimed Avice, in dismay. "Oh ! do you think that my brother is so ill ?"

"It's all stuff, Avice," said Phillip, impatiently. "I'll have no doctor. Take a coach, Mrs. Rae, and fetch your sister. I'm certain that this is only something that any ordinarily skilled person will be able to cure very soon."

"I would fetch her with pleasure, sir," said Mrs. Rae, "but to speak the truth, she has taken to monthly nursing, and she's at this minute waiting on a lady that's got a hard time of it, and not over yet, I'm afraid ; leastways it

wasn't over this morning, and ought to have been. It's the lady's first, sir, and a nice lady she is, Mrs. Moore; and her husband just at his wits' end about her."

"Confound Mrs. Moore!" exclaimed Phillip, tossing about uneasily. "I beg pardon—just now I don't want to hear of other people's troubles, having more than enough of my own. Can't you bathe my head with vinegar and water? I think that would do good."

"I can do that, sir, in course; but I think you'd best have a doctor at once. I saw Mr. Osborne step in to No. 8 just now. Perhaps you'd like to see him, sir."

"He'll be quite sure to look in here before he goes, so don't fetch him. Bring the vinegar and water, and my sister shall bathe my head."

Mrs. Rae looked stealthily at Avise, and shook her head ominously as she went out. Avise could scarcely restrain herself from uttering a cry, as if some sudden pain had struck her—as it had. Alarmed and anxious to the highest degree, she yet exerted herself to appear composed before Phillip. When the vinegar and water came, she commenced bathing his head.

"That feels very nice," said Phillip. "Don't you mind that croaking old woman. It won't do

to make a fool of one's self by calling in a doctor for nothing. But this is very provoking, to say the least of it. My poor Avice, I intended you to spend the day very differently to this. However, I may be better in half an hour or so ; and if not, there are plenty of days to come. I'm almost as glad we're stopping indoors, for I shall have an opportunity of introducing you to Osborne. Remember you are to like him very much."

"I know that I shall like him ; he is your friend," said Avice.

"A friend of the true stamp : he is a noble fellow, Avice. He was with me at Eton, and is several years younger than I am—about twenty now, I think, and I always liked him. He is not, however, the sort of person that every one would like. He belongs to a family that has always been remarkable for originality and force of character, and he bears about him distinct marks of his origin. You could not conceive, at least I cannot conceive of him, that his character has been moulded by the way, that training has had anything to do with making him what he is. His strong self-reliance, and determined will, and proud reserve, are his own by right of birth ; and, I believe, he makes only noble use of them. He does not seek acquaint-

ances, he makes no effort to please, and yet there is a power about him that draws you to him when you begin to know him thoroughly. Few would seek him; and those he chooses to keep at a distance, would never make the attempt; but where he takes a liking he establishes an influence. I am only giving the hard outlines of a portrait, remember, leaving out the lights and shadows that soften and beautify the whole."

"I like the description," said Avice. "No man can be truly noble whose great power is not in himself. Now, is your head any better, dear Phillip?"

"Yes;—no, I think not: never mind just now. What was I saying? Oh! this about Osborne. He is the sort of man that would give his life for his friend. If I was dying just now, leaving you girls in the world without a penny, I should know that if I said to him, 'I bequeathe you my sisters, you must be a brother to them,' he would accept the charge with pride and gratitude, and act to the end like the generous, honourable man he is."

"And he likes you so much, Phillip! Ah, how glad I am! because you, too, are noble—deserving of such a friend. You are very

feverish, and your temples throb : I wish you would send for a doctor—just to please me, Phillip.”

“ Confound that woman for mentioning a doctor !” said Phillip, irritably. “ Do, Avice, be sensible. I’m not angry, pet ; but this harping upon one disagreeable string annoys me. If you ever marry, Avice—and I suppose you would not be an old maid for anything, eh ?”

“ Our aunt De Burgh is an old maid, and a noble woman,” said Avice ; “ but I think I would rather marry. It must be such a pride and a pleasure to have noble sons and daughters—a son like you, for instance, Phillip.”

“ Or a daughter like yourself. I was about to say, that if you ever marry, I shall be most anxious for your happiness, feeling sure that there are so few in the world who would be at all able to understand you. That dreamy mind of yours ; that noble, trusting, enthusiastic nature, will find no legitimate place assigned to them in the crowd. Every shade and description of character has ready recognition ; but such as you, Avice, will always stand apart, as being less of this world than others are. I am glad to believe that you are not likely to be sought as a wife very readily ; men turn instinc-

tively to the natures that have some correspondence with their own. There are coarse, vulgar-minded women to suit men of their own stamp ; vain, frivolous, worthless women, who please more shallow and empty men merely learned women, who suit any that take to them ; outrageously pious women, who find plenty to denounce and howl in concert with themselves ; shrewd, common-sense women, who incline to worldly-mindedness, and are favourites with most descriptions of men ; and so on to the end of the chapter,—but where on earth is the man that will find a large part of himself in you ? I like Walter Osborne for this, Avice—he is the only man I ever yet knew into whose hands I could resign you with pleasure.”

“Don’t talk so much, dear Phillip,” said Avice, beginning to feel more alarmed, for Phillip seemed excited, and the flush on his face deepened, and his temples throbbed almost audibly. “I think it would do you good to try and sleep. This easy chair is so comfortable, and I will sit and watch ;—or shall I try to read you to sleep, as I did many a time at the old Place ?”

“No, that wouldn’t answer just now, Avice. I must try to do something for myself.” And he arose and walked to the window, with his

arm round his sister's waist. The window looked out upon the enclosure leading through the Temple gardens down to the Thames. Everything outside looked gay in the still glorious sunshine, and a refreshing breeze played upon their faces as they stood.

“If there was—as there is not—any danger of your ever falling away from your own high faith, Avice, I should warn you to cleave to it as the all of life worth calling life,” said Phillip. “The beauty, and grandeur, and sublimity, and divine goodness, revealed everywhere in this glorious universe, tell us plainly enough that no cramping creeds ; no narrowing prejudices and beliefs ; no down-beating bigotries that dictate as they will, being incapable of themselves ; no formal observances that act as a shield for coward consciences, that fear to stand unarmed in the formidable presence of Truth, have any divine right to justify their cruel successes in the way of impoverishing, and degrading, and deforming the grand spiritual life of man. You, Avice, whose spirit lighted long ago on some range of the eternal heights, are too surely lifted beyond the reach of these meshes to be entangled by them ; but who will stand erect at your side when you have gone

from me, or I from you? And how will you bear to stand humanly alone? Will you then show grandly as you should, and could, and let the everlasting suffice to you? Will you feel then as now that the eternal arms are around you, and that there is no loneliness to them that hold high communion with their God? I ask these questions, but there is no doubt in my heart, and you shall not answer, Avice. That brave loyal spirit will be faithful, I know; but the loving heart must suffer;—it is so decreed for all of us, and will be.”

Large tears were streaming down the cheeks of Avice, and she could not command her voice to make any reply. The revulsion of feeling, the sudden passing from a state of extreme contentment and joy to one of anxiety, and dismay, and dread, had been too much for her, coupled with this solemn tone in Phillip, which was not usual with him. Her nature was excitable and therefore weak, if her spirit was steadfast, and she stood silent, suffering already in the depths of her loving heart.

“Look yonder!” exclaimed Phillip, eagerly, after they had stood some minutes in silence; “observe those two gentlemen advancing up the walk: the taller one is Walter Osborne. How

superior he looks to the other, even at this distance ! how firmly he treads the earth, as a master should ! Now he is looking up here—he recognises me : see how courteously he lifts his hat ! That is in honour of you, Avice. I told him that my pet sister would shortly pass a day with me ; and he understands your character from my description, as you now understand his. Yet how much remains for you to discover in each other that would delight both ! I almost wish that I had not said so much about him now. I should like to have known what your first unbiassed impression of him would have been.”

“And I almost wish that you had not mentioned me to him, Phillip,” said Avice, feeling slightly oppressed in a new way ; “your description would be so much more favourable than I deserve. But I do hope that he will come to see you before going away. Do you think he will ?”

Feeling more and more alarmed about her brother, Avice did long for the appearance of this individual, from whose presence she might have been inclined to shrink a little after what Phillip had said.

“Oh, he’s sure to come,” said Phillip. “And now, I believe, I must retreat again to the chair you call *easy*. I wish I could feel easy any-

where. The light seems too much for me"—(Avice was at the window in an instant, and drew down the blind). "Thank you, darling; now I think you shall bathe my head again."

Avice resumed this task, looking anxiously in Phillip's flushed face. The beat of her heart kept painful time with the continued throbbing in his temples; and, with a great dread upon her, she forgot Walter Osborne, except in his character as a friend who might advise what was best to do. Avice listened long for a foot-step or a knock with impatience. Both came at length; and Phillip started, and said—

"Come in."

Walter Osborne entered, and took in the whole scene at a glance. Avice, with her evident anxiety and deep love—Avice, with her very fair face, its delicate features shaded by a profusion of dark-brown hair; her slight, girlish figure and wondrously small white hands, became to him on the instant one of those pictures of life that, to the latest moment of his own life, would come back to him in all its vividness of the moment. He looked from her to Phillip, and his strong nature was greatly stirred.

“My friend Mr. Osborne,” said Phillip.
“Walter, my sister, Avice.”

Walter Osborne bowed with a reverential air that would have befitted one of the most chivalrous of the knights of old ; then he grasped Phillip’s hand firmly. At that time young Osborne had no dearer friend than Phillip.

“I am grieved to find you ill,” he said.
“How long have you been in this state?”

“Not long, but too long for me,” said Phillip, tossing about restlessly. “I fetched Avice up this morning, intending to give her a treat, and here she is nursing me. Only think of that !”

“I think only of the treat it will be to see you well again,” said Avice. “My brother objects to call in a doctor, Mr. Osborne : do you not think that he is wrong ?”

“Decidedly wrong, if only because you wish him to consult one, Miss Avice. There is a little wilfulness about Phillip of which I never take any heed. This is his first illness, I believe ; and he is not aware that only to look at a doctor is a good specific in some complaints. Most certainly he must try this simple remedy ; and fortunately my friend Dr. Garth is at hand. Excuse me, I will return in a few minutes.”

He was gone even as he spoke. The interest

he evidently felt, his decision, his very presence, had tended to reassure Avice. To her, a girl of sixteen, a young man of twenty appeared entitled to some consideration in respect of his years ; and besides, Walter Osborne had a very manly look. Not taller than Phillip, but more largely made, he had also strongly marked features ; and his swarthy complexion helped to make him look older than he was. His countenance would have been decidedly plain if it had not exhibited at the first glance wonderful powers of expression. Avice imagined for herself how proud and determined he could look when he would ; though, whilst gazing on herself and Phillip, she had only seen in his very fine eyes a tender sadness that had touched her deeply.

Walter Osborne hurried down into the Temple Court in search of Dr. Garth, from whom he had just parted, and whom he found where he had left him. Though he made light of the matter before the brother and sister, he was himself seriously alarmed, and convinced that Phillip needed prompt attention. He was greatly distressed, too, loving Phillip as a brother, and dreading his loss as mortals must dread the loss of whatever seems essential to their happiness. He had first been attracted towards Phillip by

the strong contrast betwixt the latter's fortunes and his own ; and a conviction, at which he arrived by many winding paths, that they two ought to change places. Proud, but sensitive to excess, evidently delicate in constitution, and wanting in the energy that springs from a full confidence in self, Phillip Desborough seemed wrongly situated as a dependant, having no future but such as he might make for himself. Walter Osborne, on the contrary, with his almost burdening consciousness of great mental and physical power ; his more burdening family history, that whenever it crossed his mind shook him into a tempest of passion that seemed to uproot from his very nature the instinctive pride of birth and race ; was out of his proper sphere and element as the heir of immense wealth, which, if it did not bar exertion, offered him no motive to it. He was conscious, too, of being wanting in, or not being allowed to exercise, those peculiar feelings, sentiments, and tastes that would have rendered the possession of great wealth an unspeakable happiness to Phillip. Then, being noble as he was, he cleaved to Phillip because others shunned him. Himself closely connected with Lady Otley, who had been related to his mother, and who had always tried to make a favourite of him

—because of his prospects, as he truly surmised—he learned enough of the Desboroughs from that source to enable him to understand on what side lay not only the nobleness, but the true wealth. Walter Osborne showed greatly in this: loving Phillip for many reasons, he also loved him because he envied him as one who rejoiced as man never did before in the father and sister that God had given him. Phillip was to him a great as well as an admirable and loveable man ; great because his hands were strengthened by that pride and happiness in his home. Also, Walter Osborne loved Phillip for his own noble qualities ; for the brave struggle into which he had entered with his whole heart ; and because Lord Otley, whom Walter perfectly detested, never knew anything about him.

To this friend, about whom he thought so much, and who was in fact much to him, Walter Osborne returned, accompanied by Dr. Garth, whom he prepared to meet Avice. He also mentioned his own fears to Dr. Garth, who made no reply, but walked on in silence until he stood face to face with his patient.

“ Pain in your head ? ” said Dr. Garth ; “ ah, yes ; I see. You have been exerting yourself too much. Never mind, you had better lie

down ;—go regularly to bed, you know, till you feel quite well. Here is your sister, who will watch over you tenderly, I am sure ; and your friend Mr. Osborne, who can stop with you as long as you like (the doctor said this at a venture). Now do let me see you in bed before I go, and then I shall feel more sure of you. I don't think much of a patient who walks about ; and though you may not feel inclined to be made much of by a doctor, I can assure you that you will find the benefit of obeying me in the long run. You must yourself feel that you require perfect rest."

"My dear doctor," said Phillip, rather pettishly, "I am resting here as well as I can rest anywhere just now. As to going to bed, I must be off to Hampton Court in a few hours. You will see that scarcely anything is the matter with me ; and I assure you that Mr. Osborne must bear all the blame of calling you in to so trifling a case."

"Mr. Osborne's shoulders are broad enough to bear anything," said Dr. Garth. "But having been called in, I should like to do something, if only in a small way. Now, if you *must* go to Hampton Court in a few hours, just consider the advantage that it may be to sleep a little in the

meantime. Your sister thinks as I do, I am sure ;—Mr. Osborne, what do you think ?”

“ I think that Mr. Desborough will take my arm at once, and do what you, and myself, and Miss Avice, consider best for him,” said Walter Osborne, adopting the doctor’s tone with a sinking heart. “ Phillip and I are old friends, Dr. Garth, and you see that I take liberties with him.”

“ I see,” said Dr. Garth. He saw, too, that after drawing his sister towards him and kissing her, Phillip gave his arm to Walter Osborne very quietly.

“ You will come and sit by me presently, Avice,” he said, and allowed himself to be taken away.

After an interval, Dr. Garth and Walter Osborne stood together for a few minutes in a passage leading from Phillip’s bed-room. “ What is the matter with him ?” asked the latter.

“ Brain fever,” said Dr. Garth. “ He has not much constitution, and it may fare badly with him. He seems to be much attached to his sister, and she to him.”

“ They have only one heart and soul between them,” said Walter Osborne.

“ God help them !” said the doctor. “ Now

you must attend to me—you stop here, I suppose ?”

“Most assuredly.”

“Before long he will be delirious ; during the night he may be outrageous, and you must have help at hand. I will send a nurse on as soon as possible, and medicine, which you must get him to take as well as you can ; and I will myself return in a few hours. I don’t know what to say about his sister. It will be well that he should be humoured in everything ; and if he wishes her to be with him it will be a pity if her nerves are too weak to bear the trial.”

“Love is strong ; Avice Desborough is strong in other respects : I will answer for her,” said Walter Osborne.

“That is well,” said the doctor. “And you had better apprise Mr. Desborough’s friends of his situation at once ; for to be candid with you as I ought to be, I do not think that he will survive this attack, or that it will last long. Can I be of any assistance in this matter ?”

Walter Osborne rapidly ran over in his mind the short list of Phillip Desborough’s friends. “It would be necessary to send a message to Hampton Court, that was all ;” so he said :

“Thank you : if you will be kind enough to

call for me, or send to Mivart's hotel, and let my servant know that he must come here directly, I shall be much obliged to you. I can manage all the rest. I hope the nurse will arrive soon."

The doctor promised to be expeditious, and departed. The part that lay before the friend was hard to go through, and he stood for a few seconds on the spot where the doctor had left him, his broad chest heaving with suppressed sobs. There was no time to waste, and mastering himself with an effort, he returned to Avice.

Avice, unlike himself, had augured well from Dr. Garth's tone and manner. Her spirits had revived for a moment, only to sink lower when she again looked in Walter Osborne's face. Before he spoke she understood that the worst *might* be. With clasped hands, fixed eyes, and face from which all colour had departed, she listened while he told her how ill Phillip was likely to be before any change could be expected for the better ; and how necessary it was that she should hide all emotion from him. He was still speaking, when she startled him by saying, in a calm voice, that she was quite prepared to do what was required of her ; and by walking past him to her brother's room with a firm step.

And during the rest of that day, and the night, and the next most terrible day, Avice played her part, to all outward appearance, bravely. The disease made rapid progress with Phillip ; and besides that his paroxysms of delirium were frightful to witness, he had no intervals of consciousness during which to acknowledge or respond to the presence and manifestation of the strong love that kept faithful watch at his side. Attempts were made now and then to draw Avice from the room, but she firmly resisted them, passing nearly the whole time on her knees at her brother's bed-side, murmuring prayers of supplication out of the depths of her love and agony. During his quietest intervals Phillip gave utterance to all that had lain nearest his heart ; and then, if never before, Avice learned how much he had loved her. And still the thought pursued him,—where would Avice find her next of kin if he was taken away from her ? Then he spoke of Walter Osborne in terms that made that strong man's frame shake with emotion. Then he coupled those two together, and revealed all the desire of his heart concerning them ; and Avice did not shrink within herself because of Walter Osborne's presence, for beside the mightiness

of her grief all things showed as nothing. Then he spoke of his father as he had thought of him in past days, the days when there lay before himself the hope of making his old age happy. Then of Blanche, to whom he addressed himself touchingly, telling her he understood the language of those wondrous eyes. He said he must go immediately to his aunt De Burgh, and attempted to rise. She was dying, and still had important matters to arrange. If he did not arrive in time, his sisters would be left penniless. He was with Avice again; picturing to himself her surprise and joy when he should tell her he had brought her to Westminster Abbey. He disclosed all that little plot, and still Avice did not weep.

At ten o'clock on Friday night, Avice had tasted no food since the preceding day; nothing except a cup of tea and a little wine and water. The heart within her seemed broken, and she comprehended at last, as one in a dream, that all was over. The exhaustion of mind and body was then complete, and she fell into hysterical fits, so strong and frequent, that Dr. Garth found it necessary to remain with her during the greater part of the night.

At eleven o'clock on that night Mrs. Ræ

quitted the bed-room to which Avice had been removed, being herself in an overpowered state from witnessing so much unexpected sorrow and suffering. Proceeding to a kitchen on the basement story, she dropped into a chair and burst into a fit of crying, desiring her niece, who had brought word that Mrs. Moore had got out of her trouble, not to speak to her.

“Only to think,” exclaimed Mrs. Rae, when she had recovered herself a little, “how happy them two did look when they come here yesterday morning, and how fond of one another they was! And such a good young gentleman as he’s always been, and so handsome! And nobody coming to see him or her, as if they belonged to nobody—it seems hard. There’s Mr. Osborne, quite cut up, though he’s nothing akin to them, and I don’t think I could feel more if they was my own flesh and blood. Oh, Sarah, it’s well for Mrs. Moore that she’s got over her trouble; but this poor young thing’s just begun hers, and I’m fearsome for her. There’s a ugly look about some troubles, as if they was made a purpose for folks as is expected to take to troubles as a fish takes to water. Them two has had trouble afore now, or somebody would have been here to look after ’em; and, as I say,

the poor thing up stairs is only beginning hers."

And so it happened that Avice Desborough was left alone in the world, left to seek her next of kin, on the day that Charles Moore's eldest child, Catherine, first saw the light.

CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT a fortnight after Phillip Desborough's death, Lady Otley and her two elder daughters were one morning seated together in the back-drawing-room of the house in Brook Street, engaged in earnest consultation on some family matters. The two younger sisters were on a visit in the country, and Lord Otley, who had an establishment of his own, had been two months in Scotland, where he still remained.

The three ladies bore a striking resemblance to each other. At fifty-five, Lady Otley was a remarkably plain, not to say an ugly woman; and judging by what her daughters were, it seemed pretty certain that she could never have been much else. Lord Otley, who could not dispense with high birth in a wife, had not been otherwise particular, and certainly not mercenary; and what he chiefly fancied in the wife he chose, apart from her birth, was a certain invariable

cheerfulness and airiness of manner that had their attractions for a naturally heavy, melancholic man. The invariable cheerfulness proved in this case, as it must in many others, to mean only invariable heartlessness; but as Lord Otley never made that discovery for himself, the cheat, so far as he was concerned, did not seem to be of any consequence. Lady Otley and her daughters were dressed in mourning, and the former held in her hand a note deeply edged with black, to which she referred from time to time.

“I am sure,” said Lady Otley, who never did quite lose the airiness of manner that had been so fascinating to her lord, “I am sure that there never was so poor an invention as that of poor relations. It ought, nevertheless, to have been patented and kept in one hand. How I have been worried during the last fortnight, as if I had not real trouble enough of my own! And this silly boy!—I wonder what he is thinking about now.”

“I wish you would not wonder about it any more,” said the eldest Honourable Miss Otley, who was in her thirty-fourth year, and who was, perhaps, weary of a repetition of sentences. “I cannot understand why you should have worried

yourself as you have done." She was cold enough to marvel at her mother's excess of feeling.

"You cannot!—when I have explained everything?"

"You may be mistaken."

"I hope I am. I would not give up that hope for a good deal; but so long as there is uncertainty, I must suffer; as a mother, I consider it only right that I should consult the interests of my children above everything. Poor Amelia! do I not know that she became attached to Walter Osborne the first moment she saw him, now ten years ago, and when they were both quite little things; and has she thought of any one else since?"

"If she has, it has been without your permission, mamma."

"I never sought to have an undue influence with my children in matters of such importance, Miss Otley," said her Ladyship, with dignity. "I did certainly encourage Amelia in following the promptings of her own heart. In this case, there was nothing to deter me, as a mother, from doing so. The match would be in every way equal and desirable. Dear Amelia's softness and gentleness would act in a salutary way

on what is certainly bearish and rough in Walter's nature ; and his strength of character would be a great stay to her, dear child ! I think, considering all that had passed in that way, and how kind we had always been to him, it was very affronting to treat us in the matter of Phillip Desborough's death as he did ; making himself particularly busy and useful to others, but not in any way troubling himself about us. He left us to learn the news from others, and has not even called upon us since."

"He might have his reasons for believing that we were not likely to be overwhelmed by our grief," said Miss Louisa.

"We never did profess to feel any great interest, or any interest at all, in the Desborough family, mamma," said Miss Otley.

"We never did profess anything," said Lady Otley, "and therefore he might have given us credit for—for something. Of course, it was a sort of family concern ; and etiquette required that he should give us a call. If he had felt as he ought to do, he would have been glad of the opportunity. I cannot help feeling his neglect very keenly, after going through so much. First comes a roundabout story of young Desborough's death—I forget who brought it—

derived from a Dr. Garth, who had expatiated on Walter's devotion to the dead man and—his sister. Then we learn, in an equally round-about way, that Mr. Osborne had immediately dispatched a message to Hampton Court, which was a very thoughtless and cruel thing to do, considering Miss de Burgh's great age and infirmities. The message arrives at a time when Miss de Burgh is at her wit's end about her niece, Miss Desborough, who has suddenly disappeared, for the purpose, as it afterwards turns out, of getting married to a certain Lieutenant—I forget his name. The consequence of all this agitation is, that one morning Miss de Burgh is found dead in her bed. Superficial people say, 'Oh, she died of old age!'—*I* know that these Desboroughs killed her. Then I am of necessity dragged down to Hampton Court. I am compelled to be at the trouble of looking over all Miss de Burgh's papers—there is no one else to do it. There is not a will to be found, nor a scrap of paper of any consequence. On inquiry, it is found that she has not left any property. Mr. Vernon, on whom, you know, I reckoned a good deal, will now, I suppose, leave his money to charities. There is that stupid, weak girl, Avice, to provide for—or get rid of;

and that poor idiot, Blanche. After all, Clementina is the only sensible person of that family. She had an independent spirit, and determined to take herself out of the concern : and as she tells me that herself and her husband are quite desirous of leaving England, if they can be more advantageously placed elsewhere, I shall certainly advise Otley to interest himself about the Lieutenant. That is all quite proper, and I don't murmur : but as to this Miss Avice making a dead set at Walter Osborne, I don't understand it at all. She must be a most artful creature—I always thought she was—and, for dear Amelia's sake, I must try to circumvent her plans. I shall expect you—both of you—to co-operate with me in striving to keep Walter out of her way."

"Oh, mamma! you must not require us to interfere in such a matter," said Miss Louisa, tossing her head. "If Walter chooses to make a fool of himself it is nothing to us."

"Nothing to you, and such a large property at stake!" exclaimed Lady Otley. "It is a good deal to you. If Amelia should become Mrs. Osborne, she would have at her command immense wealth. You are well aware how straitened our circumstances are, and how difficult we

find it to live in a style befitting our rank. In the future we shall be even worse off than we have been; for many friends of my own, on whom I could rely for help now and then, have dropped off. Heigho! mine is a very responsible situation, and I am compelled to consider what is best to be done all along."

"Louisa talks nonsense," said Miss Otley. "I consider that it is our duty to prevent Walter so throwing himself away if possible. As to Miss Avice, she has not been brought up to any great expectation; and if a situation of some kind, as governess, for instance, was procured for her, she might think herself well off. She might be sent abroad in that or any other capacity, and, under present circumstances, I don't see that she could object."

"My dear Miss Otley," said her Ladyship, laughing lightly, "you must allow me to say that you know nothing about these matters. With my own experience of the world, I know very well that if we interfere at all we shall never be rid of Miss Desborough or her sister. We never have in any way mixed ourselves up with the Desboroughs, we have never interfered in their affairs. This relation with them must not be altered. We know nothing about them.

That is the whole matter. Left as these two girls are, they act as they please. Whatever Miss de Burgh died possessed of they take. I found about fifty pounds in money, which I gave up to them at once. Then the furniture will fetch something. I told Mrs. Ritson that it must be sold at once, and that she and the two girls, if the three chose to keep together, had better take up their abode in some country town, where they might make friends who would be useful to them hereafter. I gave her distinctly to understand that we must keep aloof, as we always had done. Of course, we do not know—understand this—what amount of money Miss de Burgh might have had in the house at the time of her death. How do I know that Avice Desborough had not helped herself before I arrived? I would not answer for any one in such a case; and though the girl affects to be very ill, and very much cut up, and all that, I am sure she has her wits about her. I am really sorry about Ritson, because it would only have been decent to have made some provision for so old a servant; but the Desboroughs have stood in her way—literally swept off everything at one time or another. Now, you see, if they quietly go away—and I'll take care they don't

stop yonder much longer—if that girl is not shameless enough to throw herself in Walter's way, he may altogether lose sight of them; in which case, if there has been any impression, it will soon wear off. You understand all this—that these girls take possession of everything, down to the proceeds of the furniture; that I have paid all the funeral expenses, which, in strict justice to my family, I ought not to have done. The girls have unlimited power, and act as they please; they have never liked us, and do not consult us. I think our own position is very clear."

"Certainly, you take the proper view of the matter, mamma," said Miss Otley; "if Walter does not spoil all by interfering."

"He must not be allowed the opportunity, Miss Otley. You see what he says in his note" (again referring to it). "He has received a message summoning him to Staunton Court immediately. He may be absent a week, and in the meantime they must go. He never saw the girl except on the occasion of her brother's death; he has not seen her since her return to Hampton Court. You see what he says on that subject: he fears that the sight of him would affect her too powerfully just now. Very ten-

derly considerate, indeed, that ! He says nothing about us, but merely acquaints me with his desire to have an interview on the subject before he goes. It may be in order to see how I intend acting in the matter ; it may be in order to offer help through me. In either case, I must be very wary. That knock does not announce him : it will be your uncle."

It was the thundering knock of a footman that was heard, and presently an elderly, portly, red-faced, clerical gentleman made his appearance in the drawing-room. He could be very sleek and deferential ; very pompous and overbearing ; very decidedly cold and unapproachable, —as circumstances required ; and just now he was very cordial and familiar. This personage was Lady Otley's elder brother, a dean and a bachelor, and the holder of several lucrative livings.

The first greetings being over, Lady Otley quickly drew his attention to the note she still held in her hand, which she gave him to read, explaining the case as far as she considered it necessary that he should understand it. She wished to have his opinion about Walter's conduct in the matter altogether.

"Some death in the Osborne family ?" asked

the dean, turning the note over after reading it.

“No : it is Walter’s whim to go into mourning for young Desborough. I expect to see him looking as dismal as an undertaker at a state funeral.”

“Very romantic !” said the dean, smiling. “Hem !” Whenever the dean cleared his throat preparatory to delivering himself of an opinion, he seemed to gain for the instant an accession of importance, and rosiness, and plumpness. “I should decidedly say that this communication bespeaks an interest—a great interest I may say—in the—a—the survivors or survivor. Still I do not go all the length with you of supposing that—a—that he may or has become too greatly attached to this girl. Being a relative of my own, I am naturally as anxious about him as you can be. It is very desirable that you should pay him all the attention in your power, he being allowed—with unlimited means, I believe—to be entirely his own master at so early an age, and never having had, in fact, a home or home ties. I believe I have spoken to you on this subject before (he had very frequently) ; and I should have expected—a—that Walter would have been glad to avail himself of the opportunities here afforded him for enjoying the plea-

tures of female society, of—a—a home, in fact. I assure you I have been sorry to observe that he is seldom to be found here.”

“My conscience does not accuse me in this matter,” said Lady Otley (she had a conscience, and could appeal to it). “I have always exerted myself greatly in order to make Walter happy with us. Dear boy! my own children know how I felt for him in his childhood, motherless and little cared for by any as he seemed to be. That eccentric father of his never could endure his presence; and living all along as he has done at school or college, I have never neglected any opportunity of paying him the attentions he really required. In fact, I have always shown him the affection of a mother, and my girls have been sisters to him. I must say that Walter has not proved himself to be of a grateful disposition. He has at all times a disagreeable, rough way with him that is something to put up with; but I have always borne with his humours as few would. What could I do more than I have? He conducts himself towards me with respect generally; he makes the girls expensive presents; but he never did seem happy amongst us, as I should have liked him to be. I am afraid that he

has formed very improper acquaintances ; for instance, through whom could he have obtained introductions to more than one unfit associate of whom we know ?”

“ I am entirely of your opinion that—a—that perhaps his tastes are rather low. I have allowed him opportunities for cultivating a closer intimacy with myself, but he never seemed to understand that—a—that it would be for his own interest to take advantage of them. Still, though he has by no means used us well, he must not be lost sight of. I certainly do think with you that—a—that he was a little attached to Amelia.”

“ They are both of an age, and played together as children,” said Lady Otley ; “ and certainly he always considers Amelia before any of us. But even she, dear girl, cannot draw him here as she wishes ; and you see, brother, the dear child’s whole heart is devoted to him. I am sure it is very painful for me to witness all this ; to know that the whole happiness of my child’s life may be wrecked.” Did Lady Otley believe in all that she asserted whilst taking out her handkerchief and applying it to her dry eyes ?

“ It is a very painful case, indeed,” said the dean, stroking his double chin, “ but we must act with becoming dignity. I can’t imagine

how it happened that Otley and Walter never got on together? I think Otley always paid him becoming attention?"

"Always. At one time he quite made a point of it; but Walter never responded to him; and it ended in disgust on Otley's part. Otley is too refined for Walter, who can be excessively coarse. I am sure you must have seen that."

"I have, certainly; and with much concern. Considering the position that he will occupy hereafter, it is a great pity. There is evidently nothing affectionate in his nature; he pays no regard to family ties. Stunington (the earl, the dean's brother) has never been able to make any progress with him, though to my knowledge he was quite inclined to take him to his heart as a son (as a son-in-law he was assuredly inclined to take him to his heart any day). Still, as I have said, we must not forget that he is a relative, and that we owe a duty to him. Depend upon it that—a—that a kind, conciliatory manner—an indulgent manner, suppose we say—will always be most becoming in you, as best agreeing with the motherly relation in which you have hitherto stood to him; and as being most agreeable to your own feelings. Perhaps it would be as well if Amelia allowed him to see

how much his apparent indifference and prolonged absences troubled her. You ladies should understand these matters better than—a—better than I do.”

It was not in Lady Otley's nature, as she declared, to be otherwise than kind and indulgent to Walter Osborne. As to Amelia, she should certainly recommend on her return that she should not altogether smother her feelings before Walter, but allow him to be so far conscious of his power over her that he would not be able to plead ignorance hereafter if his continued unkindness led to any serious consequences. Having unburdened and relieved her mind in this way (and in all that she had said she was quite as sincere as she had ever been in any transaction at any period of her life), Lady Otley felt better prepared for the expected interview with Walter Osborne, which took place shortly after the departure of the dean.

On his arrival he was shown into a room where Lady Otley was seated alone, it having been decided by the three ladies that, as some of his questions might prove embarrassing, it would be as well to get rid of them in as summary a way as possible, which might prove difficult to be done where there were many speakers.

He looked as dismal as possible in his deep black; and Lady Otley could not help wincing a little as she discerned in his haggard look and unusually subdued manner unmistakable signs of his having recently suffered deeply.

“My dear boy!” exclaimed her ladyship, approaching him with apparent eagerness, and lifting her arms to his neck, “what an age it is since we saw you last! I ought to be cross with you, I know; but I never can be that. And you really go into Yorkshire immediately?”

Walter Osborne, in the gentlest but firmest manner in the world, released himself from her ladyship’s arms, and placed her in a chair.

“I set out this evening,” he said. “As I ventured to tell you in my note, I wish to have a little conversation with you before I go, on a subject that should—that must be interesting to yourself. You have seen the Misses Desborough since their brother’s and aunt’s death, and I am most anxious to learn how they are situated; how they bear up under this double calamity. When did you see them last?”

Lady Otley hesitated for an instant. She had not seen them since the day of Miss de Burgh’s funeral, nearly a week back, and she scarcely liked to acknowledge this. Not being

ready, however, she blurted out the truth, with a little addition that was not true.

“I have not been to Hampton Court since the day Miss de Burgh was buried. I have been really too much indisposed. My nerves have sustained a great shock. You must be sure,” she continued, beginning to feel herself aggrieved, “that the awfully sudden death of my dear husband’s only sister has been very afflicting to me.”

“You have felt it, of course. The case of those two young ladies is still more distressing. They have lost a very dear and near relative and true friend; one who was to them the sole stay they had in life. In the course of nature Miss de Burgh could scarcely have survived long; but Philip Desborough—” He stopped; he had not intended to speak of his friend before Lady Otley—not in this strain, as if he expected to find that she had been at all touched by the young man’s death. It seemed a kind of profanation. He checked himself, therefore, and said:

“As a very sincere and attached friend of their late brother, I am naturally solicitous about the welfare of these young ladies. I claim the right that he himself would freely have

given me of watching over their interests, of promoting them to the utmost of my power. I do hope that you, Lady Otley, will afford me every opportunity of gratifying my wishes in this respect; that you will aid me in the performance of what is to me a sacred duty. I have not yet learned in what circumstances they have been left."

Lady Otley saw that he was terribly in earnest, and that she must act with decision. "How good and kind it is of you to feel for them as you do—so like you!" she exclaimed. "I am sincerely glad to be able to satisfy you on one point. They are not by any means left destitute, as they take whatever Miss de Burgh died possessed of; not a great amount of property; I am not prepared to say how much; but certainly there is no need to fear for them on this score. There was no will; but of course I have not thought of touching anything, though my children have an equal right. And so, my good, dear boy, you can go away feeling as happy as you deserve to be."

Her good, dear boy did *not* feel happy, or at all satisfied. He abhorred all shams; he knew that Lady Otley was thoroughly insincere; light-minded, light-hearted, flimsy altogether, and

withal, confident in her own powers of making others believe anything she liked. He sat chafing now under the infliction of her butterfly manner, her hopping from one solemn subject to another with the daintiest and lightest of touches, as if to invest them with a kind of grace that was all her own was her peculiar and only province. He had not expected to find any depth, any heart in her; he was not exactly disappointed; but his nature, strong and earnest, was ill-fitted to be brought into too close contact with hers.

“I have expressed myself very imperfectly, I dare say,” he said, after a minute’s pause, “which may be one reason why your own words do not convey to me the kind of satisfaction I sought. I came here with some idea, not merely of seeking from Lady Otley, the widow of their dead uncle, a few bare facts respecting the position of these orphan girls with regard to money matters, but of finding, unsought, in one who has children of her own, some womanly recognition of their many claims to sympathy, unprotected as both are, and almost heart-broken as I know one to be. I do not understand, from anything you have said, that my friend’s sisters have from *any* quarter received the kind of help of which they most stand in need just

now. I have nothing to say respecting ties of blood except this : if they merely serve to choke up the approaches to kindly feeling ; to shut out all its light from the desolation that common humanity can weep over in their absence ; the sooner they are snapped asunder, shivered into atoms, flung to the winds, dispersed, lost sight of the thinnest air, so as no longer to be a reproach and nothing more in the sight of men, the better !”

This was an ebullition of Walter’s coarseness. Lady Otley reddened with vexation and anger. It was not impossible to rouse such nature as she had ; but she was accustomed to small measures ; to stopping at half-measures ; there was nothing in her to get up anything half so noble as a downright, earnest burst of passion, on finding herself rated at her conscious real worth. *She could not afford to offend Walter Osborne.* She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and this time they were not dry.

“ I think,” she said, “ I ought to have hoped for more merciful consideration from you, Walter, who have always received from me the attention of a mother. You speak hastily without knowing all the facts, and, therefore, I excuse you ; I even forgive you at once, though you

may not know that you require forgiveness. You condemn me, whom you have known all your life, for some imagined treatment of a girl, or two girls, of whom you know nothing. In Lord Otley's lifetime I tried my best to be peace-maker between him and his nephew, the father of these girls, who were nearly always at variance. I failed; and Colonel Desborough, who was most implacable in his resentment for injuries, real or imagined, made a determined stand against me and mine when he returned to England from India. After Lord Otley's death, I did all I could to conciliate him, but he would not meet me on any terms, and I gave up my attempts at a reconciliation. He brought his children up with this feeling of hostility to me and mine: and it is not easy to approach people when they are determined to keep you aloof. Since my sister-in-law's death, Miss Arvice Desborough has shown me pretty plainly that I am not wanted—that I am, in fact, an intruder at Hampton Court: she wishes to have her own way there, I yield to her, and you blame me. I shall, however, continue to perform my duty, so far as I am allowed. I will not lose sight of the girls; I will do them all the good in my power, not expecting the thanks of any one."

Walter Osborne knew so certainly that all Lady Otley had uttered was hollow and untrue, that he was sorry he had provoked the utterance of it. Still, in dealing with such a personage, he found that he must himself descend to subterfuges; and knowing that she *would* cleave to himself, and *why*, he hoped that, if only for the purpose of keeping well with him, she would preserve some show of kindness in her dealings with the two girls. How he wished in his deep, earnest heart, that he possessed some near female relative of his own, worthy to act as agent betwixt him and the two objects of his solicitude, who were to himself so unapproachable in their loneliness and sorrow!—a sister, for instance—he recoiled from *that* thought, and started from his chair, and stood ready to depart.

“I am conscious of having always stood high in your favour,” he said—(he could not add that he was grateful for it, and therefore did not)—“and if in any way I have done you wrong, I must be a great culprit. I do now rely upon your promise to do your best for these very forlorn girls. Before I go, I wish to place in your hands this packet”—(he held it out, and she took it.) “It contains the proceeds of the

sale of Phillip Desborough's effects. I pray you very earnestly" (in his own earnestness he forgot that there was no earnestness in her) "to explain this as delicately, as feelingly, as possible to Miss Desborough. I wrote to Miss de Burgh on the subject, and she replied, thanking me for my offer to act in the matter, and instructing me as to what articles belonging to her nephew she and his sisters wished to preserve. The letter was written only two days before her death. I acted with authority, therefore; and now it only remains for me to hand over the money so obtained."

It was a great relief to him to get rid of this money, so much larger in amount than could have been realized by the sale of Phillip's goods and chattels. It remained unknown to Lady Otley that he had himself gone down to Hampton Court with the parcel containing such articles of Phillip's property as he had been desired to preserve; even watching at a distance its delivery at Miss de Burgh's door, so anxious was he for its safety.

"It was very good and friendly, and like you; I must say that again, whatever you say or think of me," said her Ladyship. "And you think you may return in about a week? You

naughty boy ! I do not know why I should be so anxious about your return, seeing that you don't care to visit us when you are here ! Rest quite assured that I shall deliver your packet and message in the best possible manner. By-the-bye, I had a letter from Amelia the other day, and she asked very anxiously for some news of her old playmate."

Walter Osborne hoped that she and her sister were quite well.

"Oh, yes ! perfectly well ; that is, Amelia is as well as a too-sensitive nature will allow her to be at any time. Dear child ! she is all heart, as you should know. Come, you must say 'good-bye' to Miss Otley and Louisa, who are waiting to see you very impatiently, I know. Ah, Walter, you will never understand how much we all love you !"

The Misses Otley made their appearance, all smiles and cordiality ; and after conversing with them for a short time, and having submitted to a very motherly embrace from Lady Otley, Walter Osborne took his leave.

Not many amongst us, perhaps, would be eager to avail ourselves of the opportunity, if it was ready to our hand, of hearing whatever our dearest friends may please to say of us behind

our backs. Lady Otley would not for worlds have had that privilege conceded to Walter Osborne during the half hour that succeeded his departure from her presence on this occasion. She was not at all aware that whatever she said would neither astonish nor pain him in the least.

“I have been mightily entertained,” she exclaimed, tossing on a table the packet he had delivered to her. “All his conversation has been about these Desboroughs; what he has done for them, and what we have *not* done—as if he had any right to dictate what we ought to do, or any understanding as to what is proper for us to do! How bearish he can be! I declare he was almost insolent to me, and all on account of this Miss Avice! Upon my word, if I did not feel assured that Amelia’s affections are hopelessly entangled, I would not bear with Walter’s coarse manners as I do now. He says this packet contains the proceeds of the sale of Phillip Desborough’s furniture. Now I was down at Hampton Court during the time that Miss de Burgh was fishing out of odd holes and corners the ricketty chairs, tables, and so forth, that were afterwards conveyed to the Temple for his use; and I know very well that at a sale—especially after his use of them during six years

at least—they would not fetch five pounds. I wonder what Walter makes of it. I know him very well; he can be what is called generous, but what *I* call extravagant. This is an odd-looking packet, is it not? (taking it in her hands again). Now I do wonder what sum of money it contains.”

The Misses Otley wondered what sum of money it contained; and turned it over in their own hands; and all agreed that it *was* an odd-looking packet—small, compact, sealed with black, and withal tied with a black cord. The curiosity of the trio was certainly roused.

“It will be quite as well that I open the packet,” said her ladyship at length; “I am merely required to hand over the money, which I shall do; but I consider that I am in duty bound to watch over Walter’s proceedings of any kind, which I shall do to the best of my ability.” And acting up to these conscientious motives, she opened the packet.

“A purse—dear me!—a very elegant purse, is it not? And the contents—two notes for fifty pounds each! There! I told you! You see what sort of person he is! The idea of Phillip Desborough’s effects of any kind fetching such a sum as that! And what an idea he

must have of that Avice, expecting her to accept it of him ! But she'll take it—Oh, she'll take it in the most innocent and natural way in the world ; —just as if she didn't know that it was a gift. There's no letter, however : he *does* leave the explanation to me, as he said he would. Well, with this sum, and what they get from Miss de Burgh, I don't know that the two Desborough girls will have anything to complain of. But you must see the necessity for getting this Avice out of the way. Besides, I am tired of the whole affair. I shall exert myself during the next few days, and then, perhaps, I shall be allowed a little rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

LATE on an October day, a stranger who had recently alighted from the London coach that stopped at the chief inn in Selby, took his way out of the town on foot, going in a westerly direction. He wore a travelling cloak and cap, both of which served to conceal his face. He was evidently acquainted with the road he was pursuing, for he walked straight on, making no inquiries of the few persons he met, and whom he evidently shunned, quickening his pace as he passed them. The dying daylight still served to distinguish the autumnal tints lying on the roads through which part of his course lay ; but the stranger either took no interest in these changes of nature, wonderful and beautiful to behold at all times, or at the moment he was too much absorbed to take heed of anything around him, for he walked on steadily, never lifting his eyes from the path he was pursuing.

On arriving at a gate to which a lodge was attached, he opened it, and entered on a private domain, richly wooded, and evidently of great extent. A walk of half a mile brought him within sight of a fine old Elizabethan mansion, and now for the first time the stranger fairly lifted his head and looked before him. He seemed moved, too, for while standing still a few moments, with his arms folded, he sighed deeply, and muttered to himself. Shivering slightly, he drew his cloak more closely around him, and walked on rapidly, until he stood before a side door. He rang a bell, and a man servant appeared.

“Is there any one in the oak parlour?” asked the stranger.

“Oak parlour? No, sir. Is it Mr. ——?”

“Send lights immediately, and tell Lady Cope that she will find me there. I am your master’s son.”

It was ten years since Walter Osborne had last crossed the threshold of his father’s house. He strode past the startled domestic, and found his way to the oak parlour. Another serving man presently entered with a couple of tall candlesticks, which he placed upon a centre table. He looked around the spacious room for the new

comer, and saw no one. At length he discerned a figure wrapped in a dark cloak lying on a sofa in a remote corner. He hesitated, lingered.

"I wish you welcome home, sir," he said. The man's faltering tone did not match with his words.

"Thank you, my friend," said Walter Osborne, courteously but wearily.

"Is there anything I can do for you just now, sir?"

"Nothing. Has Lady Cope been apprised of my arrival?"

"Thomas has just gone to her ladyship: she will be here directly, sir."

The man saw that he could do nothing just then except take his departure, and he did so. Presently a tall, lean, strong-featured elderly lady, dressed in black, walked noiselessly into the room, closing the door behind her. It was Lady Cope, the only and widowed sister of Mr. Osborne. With a very stately step she advanced to the centre of the room and there stood still. Walter Osborne started from his reclining position, threw off his cap and cloak, and approached the lady with extended hand. She held out hers; it was cold, and did not return the slight pressure of which it was conscious.

"How is my sister?" asked Walter Osborne.

"Well, as to health," said the lady, retreating a few paces. "Stand where you are a moment. You have grown since I saw you last—nearly twelve months ago; grown taller and broader; and you have the true grim, swarthy, look of an Osborne about you already. This is a great satisfaction to me. I like to see the family likeness perpetuated in old races; it is a proof of true blood, to begin with. Sit down. You received my letter, and have acted up to the instructions I gave you?"

Walter Osborne bowed and remained silent.

"I told you that I wished to have a few minutes' conversation with you previous to the interview with your father, that I knew to be inevitable. You have received a letter from your father. Did he in that communication afford you any clue as to his motives for desiring your presence here?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then I have a task before me, and I trust that I shall be equal to it. You, Walter Osborne, are a stranger to your father—more of a stranger than he is to you, because you have learned much of him by report:—much more than you have liked to learn;—much more than,

with your peculiar notions, it was well that you should learn."

"What are these peculiar notions of mine that, unfortunately, seem to have met with your disapprobation, aunt?"

"Not with my disapprobation, except so far as they lead you into extremes, Walter. It is one of the first laws of nature that we should cleave to those immediately connected with us by ties of kindred and blood. It is one of the highest and most imperative of duties to uphold the honour of the race to which we belong; to keep out of common sight, as far as is possible, everything commonly supposed to be derogatory to family dignity. In short, to make a principle of withholding from vulgar observation such disunion and dissension as may exist amongst ourselves, and for the causes of which we alone are responsible. There is a penalty attached to greatness of any kind: its lightest movements are watched, reported; and it behoves all who hold an elevated position to keep a strict guard upon their speech and actions—I mean in their ordinary communications with one another."

"And what beyond that? My father, a great man in some respects, I suppose, has been so watched and reported as you say, and the

result of this watching and reporting is known to me, his son. I certainly am of your opinion, that it is best to keep out of sight what is scarcely fit to be proclaimed publicly."

"There you spoke out, all yourself! I know you very well, Walter, I have studied you; you are an Osborne, and strong in your own opinions, as all of the race have been;—but those who were greatest amongst us have given way where the family honour was concerned. Now, if you do not put a strong curb upon yourself, your meeting with your father will be like fire meeting fire. His strength has come out in ways not honourable to himself, I allow; his whole course of life has been a pain to me; but he is your father; he is my brother; above all, he is an Osborne. Above all, I say, because the family honour ranks with me over everything. Allow that he has led a dissolute life; that his tastes have been depraved; that in his social relations he has failed to be what thousands not possessing his advantages are; still, he keeps his position as one member of an ancient and distinguished race; and this position, which is recognised by the world, should not be lost sight of by his only son."

"After your own admissions respecting him,

aunt, I, his son, can scarcely refuse to concede him so much," said Walter Osborne. "But, unfortunately, in doing so, I am compelled to remember, that as one member of a race not particularly distinguished by its vices up to his time, he had no right to indulge recklessly in a course of life that reflects dishonour on all connected with him, whether of the past or present."

"This is strange language for a son to use in speaking of a father," said Lady Cope, sternly. "In your father's presence you must alter this tone altogether; and you must not expect that, out of any consideration for you, he will adopt any other manner than what is usual with himself. Always violent in his passions and rough in manner, he has been even harder to bear with of late, in consequence of a painful disease that tries a temper like his too far, and at times he is outrageous. I deemed it necessary to apprise you of the true state of matters, to prepare you for what you will certainly find; to warn you against giving way to any temper on your own part; doing or saying anything that may tend to irritate him—for it will not do. He is used to command all about him; his will has always been absolute law. What you have to do is simply not to oppose him."

“You would prepare me, in short, to meet, not a human being, but a savage beast? Well: I expect I shall have the advantage of coolness over him.”

“Your coolness is very bitter, Walter: you must be submissive; you must humour him, Whatever he says—and he will have painful things to say to you, not heeding how he says or how you take them—you must not condemn or remonstrate, but allow him to have his way: remembering that it may be in your own power hereafter to remedy many evils for which just now there is no help. Why is it that I see you in mourning?”

“I have just lost a friend.”

“It is well for you that you found a friend in this cold world, if only to lose him. I trust that you will not allow anything that you may hear or see to provoke you out of the line of conduct that I recommend. This unhappy house has already been sufficiently disturbed by contentions that have gone far towards heaping disgrace upon its inmates. I shall hope that, out of regard for your family, you will bear with the transgressions of individual members of it; feeling it to be your duty to screen their faults from the observation of the world as far as lies in your

power. Will you take any refreshment previous to seeing your father?"

"No, I thank you. Can I not first see my sister?"

"No. If you are quite prepared, I will at once apprise your father of your arrival."

Walter Osborne signified that he was ready. Looking in Lady Cope's stern, determined face, he knew that it would be useless to press just then his request to see his sister. Besides, the request had scarcely amounted to a wish with him. Brought up by her father in the midst of the most degrading influences, accustomed from her childhood to tremble in his presence, to bear humiliation in the presence of bad men and worse women; left almost without education; and at length escaping the tyranny of home only to fall temporarily into the hands of the cold, harsh Lady Cope, Caroline Osborne had at all times a cowed, humbled, irresolute look and manner that was painful to witness; and her brother now considered that it might be quite as well to defer the interview with her until the more formidable interview with his father was over. Lady Cope did not return; and a servant shortly appeared to summon him to his father's presence.

Across an immense hall, up a side staircase, along several galleries, and the servant opened a door, and announced "Mr. Walter." It was an ante-room, and he found there, not his father, but a personage whom he remembered well as one whom he had cordially disliked ten years ago—Mr. John Rycroft.

Mr. Rycroft had grown considerably stouter and redder in the face; he was better dressed, too, and looked altogether more confident and important than he had done when the boy Walter Osborne first became acquainted with him. He was, however, sleek and obsequious as ever; almost abject in his way of showing deference; and this description of self-abasement is in its overacting the most pitiful to behold. Walter Osborne instinctively recoiled from him.

"It is indeed a pleasure to see you here once more, Mr. Walter," said Mr. Rycroft. "I wish the occasion of your coming had not been so melancholy, but we must submit to the will of Providence (Mr. Rycroft never missed an opportunity of recommending submission to the will of Providence). You will find your dear father ill—very ill. He is easier just at present, but he suffers greatly at intervals, and I fear you will find him irritable. Dear me! you will

meet almost as strangers ! Allow me to pass in before you (bowing very low) ; you will remember here is a step, sir. My dear sir, here is Mr. Walter."

"Why the devil can't he show himself without all this fuss," said a hoarse voice that issued from behind the curtains of a bed. "Here you—gentleman usher—Jack of all trades—John Rycroft, come here, and put my pillow right. Damn the pillow ! it's always wrong, like everything else."

John Rycroft did as he was ordered ; and Walter Osborne, advancing to the other side of the bed, held out his hand to his father.

A face bloated and pimpled, yet evidently shrunken by illness ; a pair of bloodshot eyes that glared like those of some ferocious animal ; a remarkably large under jaw and coarse mouth. This was the picture that Walter Osborne looked upon, and he almost started back. His father had in appearance changed considerably for the worse ; still he was there, all his old self ; and none the better for the wear and tear that seemed to have left untouched and rampant as ever all that was bad in him. There was the very man that had made Walter's blood boil ten years before by striking his sister in his presence ;

the very man whose frightful oaths had more than once made it curdle about his heart. This man now motioned for him to take his hand away, and for an instant raised himself into a sitting posture, evidently with great effort.

“What do you mean, sir, by appearing before me in that state—black as the devil? Did you think that I was dead, and that you had come to my funeral? By G—, it looks like it; Jack Rycroft, isn’t that what you call deep mourning?”

“Really I—some gentlemen have a preference for black; perhaps Mr. Walter likes it.”

“Make yourself quite sure of that. He’d like very well to wear it on a certain occasion, as what heir wouldn’t; but damme, sir, what does he mean by parading it before my eyes now?”

“I will explain if you will permit me, sir,” said Walter Osborne, very quietly. “I *am* in mourning; I wear it in consequence of having lately lost a very dear friend.”

“Then by G—, sir, if you have a humour going into mourning for your friends, you are likely to be able to indulge yourself pretty frequently, for the heir to twenty thousand a year may count his friends by thousands.”

“Hitherto I have not found friends so plenti-

ful," said his son. "I scarcely hope to find one that will supply the place of him I have lost."

"Sentimental, by all that's mawkish! Damme! sir, what business has a strapping young fellow like you with sentiment? Or is it the pious dodge you're coming over us? What the devil do you mean by looking and talking like an infernal Methodist parson? I always thought you were a sneak, Walter; you gave promise of that in your boyhood; and a sneak is worse to me than poison."

"I hope to see you change your opinion, sir."

"Very meekly said; or to be able to bear the wrong I do you with becoming Christian fortitude, eh? Damme, sir, if it is a fact that you are of a serious turn, why don't you enter the church? As a mere man of property you'll make no figure; and there never yet was an Osborne that didn't come out strongly in some line. I've no objection to having a bishop in the family; it would be some proof that we're not all of a reprobate mind; and it's my belief that if you took to preaching you'd come out ten thousand strong. Think it over. Jack Rycroft, hand the brandy here. This is dry work, by Jove."

"I understood, sir, that you wished to speak

with me on some particular matter of business," said Walter Osborne.

"All in good time: you possess the patience that can wait. Curse that twinge! I say, Walter; it did occur to me, when from time to time I heard on all hands what an exemplary young man you were, that it would be no thing to have a successor as unlike myself as possible; not by way of bringing me out in strong contrast, though I don't care a curse for that, mind; but because anything decidedly new is sure to create a sensation; and I have some besetting regard for the old family tree, though I have lopped off a few of its fairest branches. Infuse new sap into it of any kind, so that it continues to flourish; turn Staunton Court into a conventicle, if you like; tickle the multitude; keep the public eye on you—that is all; and go on prospering in the Devil's name. I can tell you that I perfectly loathe and detest the whole snivelling, canting humbug that men religion; but as it happens to be one of institutions of the country, some are born to thrive by it, to rise to distinction through it; and, by Jove, sir, you have my full permission to make the most of it you can. As I have told you, sir, and as you ought to know, the

Osbornes have always distinguished themselves in one way or another. Your grandfather, sir, was a grasping man, and a miser to boot; that was his forte. He obligingly died before I was twenty-one, and I found myself in possession of thirty thousand a year. I had what are called low tastes; I chose to live altogether in the country here; and I have not been able to reduce the income by more than ten thousand. That is the one thing for which I cannot forgive myself. In my particular line I have not distinguished myself as I might have done. If I had made a smash of it, I should have been a hero; if I had reduced the original sum to five or even ten thousand it would have been something; though I dare say you consider it bad enough as it is."

"Wealth has its own responsibilities," said Walter Osborne; "and in my opinion the man that is burdened with twenty thousand a year is man to be pitied."

"I did not for a moment suppose that a gentleman of your turn of mind would care a straw for carnal advantages," said Mr. Osborne. "Though, mind you, on that very account I expect that you will fall readily into my views. Jack Rycroft, hand some brandy here. I did

imagine that there might be some small contest ; but now I perceive that it will be a very tame affair, sir. You expected that I wished to speak with you on business matters ; suppose that we begin now."

"I hoped to be allowed to speak with you alone," said Walter Osborne, glancing significantly at Mr. Rycroft.

"Jack Rycroft is my right hand. He has stuck to me through thick and thin ; he has looked after my affairs, and kept everything in order. He has never thwarted or humbugged me as others have done. In a word, he has been my counsellor and bosom friend for many years past, and he is one of the witnesses to my will. I have no disguises from him ; and as he is one chief person interested in what I have to say, it is quite necessary that he should be present."

Walter Osborne bowed in token of acquiescence. Mr. Rycroft put on a more depressed look of humility, in addition to the look of added importance which he could not help.

"What a couple of jolly devils you are !" observed Mr. Osborne, looking from one to the other. "There you both sit, very comfortably, very patiently, conscious both of you (damn you,

I know it), that while I am suffering the pains of hell everything is going on right for your advantage! I don't blame you; in your case I should act and feel the same; but, curse it, when the tables are turned it's not so pleasant. Now, my evangelical sir, my very moral and nplary young gentleman, I have the pleasure of informing you that you are about to receive some reward, even in this world. For reasons that it may not be necessary to state, it is my intention to cut your sister off with a shilling, and leave all the property to you."

"You cannot seriously contemplate anything so unjust, so cruel," said Walter Osborne, rising. "In the face of all the past, you cannot commit this crowning wrong, at a time when you must be aware that your days are numbered."

"I cannot, by G—?"

"You cannot, you *must not*."

"Harkye, my young sir, I am accustomed to have my own way; my will is law here. What I have done is done; and nothing that you can say will alter it. You are conscientious, are you? you would like all to look fair before the world? I don't care that for the world's opinion," and he snapped his fingers.

"I have not at any time had reason to sup-

pose that you valued opinions public or private ; but what is your own opinion of this act, if indeed you are not mocking me ? and is it true that you can die with such an added weight of iniquity on your soul ?”

“By Jove, sir, did you come here to bully me ? Do you know who I am, sir ? do you know that I never gave up a resolution in my life after once forming it ? Do you know that I can serve you in the same way if I like ? Jack Rycroft, give me some brandy, and be prepared to kick that gentleman down-stairs when I give the order.”

“My dear sir, pray don’t excite yourself,” said Mr. Rycroft. “Mr. Walter, you must consider the state your father is in. He must be kept as quiet as possible.”

“It’s an infernal lie, for you know I detest quiet. Now, sir, what more have you to say on this business ?”

“This much ; that I have at least some right to know what are your reasons for meditating such an injustice.”

“I dispute the right ; but I’m not disinclined to satisfy you. In the first place, your sister is insane, sir.”

“Insane ! my God ! and what has made her

so?" Walter Osborne dropped his face in his hands. He felt that this was very likely to be true, and his soul was filled with horror.

"She is insane—understand this—because it is *my will* that she should be so. If you desire to enter into particulars, I am ready for you."

Walter Osborne did not raise his head, and he remained silent, a procedure that evidently irritated the invalid, who flung a pillow across the room with a great oath. Mr. Rycroft picked it up, and readjusted it with some difficulty, again begging both gentlemen to keep quiet.

"I don't allow that any jackanapes has a right to demand explanation of whatever I may see fit to do: but, as it suits me to give it in this case, you had better pay attention. By G—, sir, your sister has disgraced herself; made herself what you would be ashamed to own; and she is *not* ashamed, but defends herself; and if force was not used she would proclaim her dishonour before all the world. What have you to say now in her defence, sir; you, for whom she does not care a straw? I can tell you, sir, that there is a low-bred, swindling scamp of a fellow for whose little finger she cares more than she ever did for the whole souls and bodies

of all her race. I don't choose that the vagabond I spoke of shall ever get a penny of mine. I don't choose that she shall have her way. I don't choose that she should ever go at large; and, therefore, I declare her to be insane, and I have appointed Mr. John Rycroft her keeper for life. This is an arrangement with which I do not allow you, sir, or any one, to interfere."

"My sister is at least married—tell me that she is married?"

"No!" roared Mr. Osborne. Drops of agony started on his son's face, and he strode hurriedly to and fro across the room.

"There's the particulars for you, and be damned to them. Mind, I'm not to be humbugged: I'll have no tampering hereafter; no interfering with my plans. I give John Rycroft a life interest in this girl, who is never to pass out of his hands. So long as she lives I give him two thousand a-year, and the sole use of this house, in addition to his usual salary, for it is my will that he continues to hold his usual place. Jack Rycroft is satisfied: I know that I can depend upon him, because it will be to his interest to be honest; Lady Cope is satisfied, so long as the family honour is taken care of, though I have given her no power in this mat-

ter, knowing all women to be fools ; and now sir, what the Devil have you got to say ?”

“I could say much, if in the midst of this wretchedness and horror it was worth while to say anything. I might remind you of what you seem to have forgotten—that your cruel neglect of this poor girl, your own child, your reckless setting before her eyes examples of the worst kind ; your shutting out from her all better influences, and withholding from her everything suited to her sex and condition—true protection, the means of education, and virtuous and refined society ; prepared her for this fall, and for nothing better. You dare to stand forth as her judge and award punishment. You—”

“I must beg that you will not speak in this way, Mr. Walter : have more consideration for your father, pray, sir,” said Mr. Rycroft.

“For your own sake,” continued Walter Osborne, not heeding the last speaker, “I pray you to reflect seriously on the part you have yourself borne in bringing all this about. You may not have long to live, and, believe me, you are unfit to die. Shame on those around you that have flattered your worst passions, and found their interest in hastening on the ruin falling alike on her and you ! Do you imagine that you

have ever had one true friend about you? that you possess one now?"

"There's a rub for you, Jack Rycroft," said Mr. Osborne, whose temper seemed to cool down in proportion as his son's rose. Mr. Rycroft was again about to set forth the advantages of peace and quietness, when his master interrupted him.

"Let him alone. Somehow I don't dislike hearing him. This reminds me of the letters he used to write from school and college; telling me sometimes, in pretty plain language, that I was not fit to have the guardianship of my own daughter. You remember them, Rycroft—you who helped me to laugh at them?"

Mr. Rycroft did not seem to like this reminiscence. He muttered something that was not intelligible, and seemed not to know what to do with his hands.

"And to such a man as that," said Walter Osborne, pointing contemptuously towards John Rycroft, "you give power over the whole future destiny of your daughter! you who *know* him. I see that you do!"

"By G—, you never spoke truer word than that in your life: Sir, I am not a fool. Don't I know John Rycroft? Don't I know that I

have bought him, body and soul; paid a price for him; and that in return for his obedience he expects hard cash? There he sits, and he can't deny it. He is my tool; I am his master."

"It is you that have been the tool, sir," said Walter Osborne, not noticing the cowering figure and blanching face of John Rycroft; "and shame on you that, knowing better, have not done better! I have no right to blame him or any one about you. Knowing what he was, seeing the evil in him, you tampered with it, fostered it, used it for your own purposes—paid a price for it, as you have said. If he had not fallen in your way he might have proved a better man. And you, if you had made better use of God's gifts, might have remained a master—which you are not of any one now."

"I'm your master any day, by G—!" said Mr. Osborne, rousing again. "I can disinherit you if I like; I can change your prospects pretty considerably, young man."

"You cannot! it is not in your power. I am determined to carve out my own path in life; and in the meantime the property I inherit from my mother will suffice for me. Henceforward, I will not touch a penny of your money. Leave it to whom you will."

“Are you in earnest, by G—?”

“More in earnest than you have ever been in the whole course of your most unhappy life. Be as sure that I mean what I say, and that I shall act up to my words, as that you are lying there helpless, not knowing where to turn for help.”

“Then, damn it, you are a brick, after all! I am proud of you, sir; proud as I never expected to be. Allow me to shake hands with you; the only thoroughly honest man I ever shook hands with in my life, I swear.” It was curious to see how this man, who cared nothing for moral worth, could appreciate force of character.

“Now we meet, Greek to Greek,” said Mr. Osborne, after the two had thus strangely clasped hands. “It is true that I have led what is called a reprobate life; but sir, I do not the less keep my place on that account. To-morrow, if I liked, I could fill this house with what is considered the first society in this place—men and women both. I am not without my share of pride; and, curse me, sir, if any female of this house shall with impunity bring disgrace on it and me! No matter how it was brought about, your sister’s dishonour must be hushed up, put altogether out of sight; and there will be no

doing this if she is allowed to go at large. Jack Rycroft is sworn to secrecy; better than that, he is bribed to secrecy. Lady Cope would sell her soul in order to keep the matter secret. Have you any particular desire to blazon it forth to the day?"

He must have known that he was probing his son to the quick. Walter Osborne felt that he was helpless; what had been decided upon might be the best or the only thing to do. His sister could never be to him what she had been, or might, under other circumstances, have become: and the one tie that had bound him to his family seemed to be snapped asunder. He no longer wished to see her: just then he could not have met her for worlds. But more than ever the atmosphere of the whole place seemed charged with pollution; he could not breathe freely, he could no longer struggle with the oppression that lay upon him, and he longed to depart. How intense now was his scorn of, his loathing for, this John Rycroft, whose base nature would be ready to use insolently and tyrannically the power this knowledge of a terrible family secret had given him! Nothing was so certain for him as that henceforward he must stand aloof, and altogether alone in the world.

“And this, sir, is the subject upon which you wished to confer with me?” he said.

“Yes, this alone. It was indispensable that you should know everything in order to prevent confusion hereafter. As to what you say about not touching a penny of the property, I do believe that you are in earnest because I could take you at your word; and because you ought to know, that I am not a man to with. But, sir, you have spoken under excitement, and I know you will cool down. If you had really turned out a sneak, sir; if I had found you ready to grasp at the whole on any terms, there would have been some satisfaction in disappointing you, and I don’t know what I might have done; but now, by G—, sir, you should have it if it was twice as much.”

“I resemble you in one respect,” said Walter Osborne. “When I have once formed a resolution I can abide by it. Be it at your own peril if you make me your heir. When I walk forth to-night it will be as a free man, and henceforward I shall rely on my own exertions alone.”

“Damn you and the property too, sir. It may go a-begging. I shall not alter my will. A grim, determined devil you do look, and

that's the truth! You are an Osborne every inch of you. You're sure to come out strongly in your own way, and this idea of giving up the property may be called original. By G—, sir, if you carry out your design it will create a sensation! I say, Rycroft, it would be no bad spec. if everything else chanced to fail, to clap a cage, and exhibit him at so much as the man who had twenty thousand a-year offered him, and refused it. May all the Devil's—”

The somewhat prolonged malediction to which he gave utterance had reference to his bodily ailments; and a paroxysm of frightful pain failed to excite much sympathy in his son, whose blood ran cold, as it used to do while listening to his fearfully profane speech. It seemed very probable to Walter Osborne that his father would not last long, and he could not help saying:—

“I wish to Heaven I might have the one satisfaction of seeing you in a different frame of mind before I go, sir. You must be aware that your condition is dangerous—that a doctor for the body can give you no lasting help. I wish—”

“Damn you, if you are about to recommend

a doctor for my soul, spare yourself the trouble. No snivel of a parson enters my house, I can tell you. What! are you one of the fools who believe that a parson can save a man's soul by mumbling over him any amount of words? Are you green enough for that?"

"No; and I would not have you entertain any belief of the kind, though I should rejoice if I could see you take pleasure in conversation of a pious man. What I was about to say was—I wished you would yourself seriously consider in what situation you stand; and how necessary it is that as you approach the confines of this time you should humble yourself before God. You would not wish to die as you have lived?"

"That's a dutiful speech from a son, by Jove! Who the Devil gave you leave to judge of my whole life? and what is it to you how I die? and, curse me, sir, what right have you to croak about dying in a sick-room? I'm dismal enough shut up here, and don't want a legion of blue devils conjuring up about me. I'm an honest man; I acknowledge that I don't want to die; that I don't mean to die just yet if I can help it. If the life I have lived satisfies me, what have you to do with it?"

“It has not satisfied you, and cannot. The life is not worth living that makes a coward of a man at last.”

The expression of Mr. Osborne’s countenance alarmed John Rycroft, who, though he wished his master dead with all his heart, did, if only for the look of the thing, hope that he would so
a decent end as not to go off in a fit
while contending with his son. In a hurried whisper he strongly advised Walter Osborne to withdraw, and the latter passed into the ante-room immediately. The time had gone by in which the two strong natures might have been brought into close contact as equals in the strife that was inevitable between them; now it was too fearful a thing to witness.

Himself rather alarmed, Walter Osborne lingered for a few minutes; long enough to hear his father pour out a volley of oaths, in the midst of which he desired that his son might be informed that he was at liberty to go to the Devil. Then he found his way to the oak parlour; and ringing the bell he desired the servant who appeared to inform Lady Cope that he wished to speak with her. The lady presently appeared, gliding in as before, and closing the door behind her. Walter Osborne stood, holding

his hands before his face ; Lady Cope stood also, rigid as a statue, and she remained silent until he spoke.

“ I have heard all,” he said at length, in a voice hoarse with emotion.

“ Whatever you have heard keep to yourself,” said Lady Cope, coldly. “ Seek no confidences : they cannot exist in this house. Do you remain here to-night ?”

“ No, I go back to Selby. Early in the morning I shall return to London.”

“ Perhaps that is best. I believe so.”

“ Before I go I must say this to you—”

Lady Cope placed her finger on her lips, and pointed first to the door, then to the walls all round.

“ This,” continued Walter Osborne, lowering his tone, “ that I trust to you, who know what a victim she has been from the beginning—how barren, and cheerless, and painful all life has been made to her ; for showing all womanly kindness to the poor erring creature who is left in your hands. She has suffered, and must suffer on ; but she is accessible to sympathy ; she needs it ; and, for God’s sake, Lady Cope allow me to believe that she will find it in you !”

He spoke with all the earnestness of his strong nature; but it was as if he addressed himself to a statue, just able by some mechanical contrivance to give a set reply that could have no variation.

"I know nothing of the matter respecting which you speak—nothing."

"You refuse me this small satisfaction? Good God! Amongst the natures brutal, and hard, and cold, what wonder that she did not spring into healthful life? Once more, Lady Cope, it is in your power to embitter even such life as is left to her. Can you—will you do this?"

"I know nothing of the subject that you have oddly chosen. What you know keep to yourself."

"Having been in some way a victim all her life, she is now to be the victim of your pride! I see it all! You are less than a woman, Lady Cope, as my father has always been less than a man!"

"I hear you without understanding. I know nothing, as I have told you—nothing."

This was something worse to bear than his father's violence. He walked to the sofa and threw himself upon it, full-length. Lady Cope

surveyed him from the spot where she stood for a few minutes, and then moved towards the door. She turned round once to fix a last look on him, then slowly opened and closed the door, and glided away.

Shortly afterwards, Walter Osborne had quitted the house. It was a dark night, and he did not once look back as he walked rapidly on in the direction of Selby.

CHAPTER IX.

AVICE, rising at length from utter prostration of mind and body, looked out upon an altogether new life—an external life in which Phillip was not; with which he was connected only because now as ever he formed so large a part of herself. Since we last brought her forward, other changes had occurred, but she had not suffered additionally. Even her Aunt de Burgh would have been no stay to her in the absence of Phillip; and that lady's death did not move her as it would have done under different circumstances. With the quietness that was peculiar to her, and with an outward appearance of ease, she put away from her—as one who was a widow indeed might put away at once and for ever the bright curls that had graced her in the days that were gone—the glowing hopes, and splendid visions, and proud expectations, that had formed for her a whole life, apart from her actual existence.

before she understood how barren, and cheerless, and loveless, the latter might become. Thus shorn of the glory of life, Avice did not show ignobly. The lesser care for herself seemed to bring out a larger care for others; and it was perhaps well for her that she found plenty to do. She was placed at once in a responsible situation. Blanche was altogether incapable; Mrs. Ritson had grown old and infirm; and these two looked up to her—the one relying upon her altogether, the other seeking her advice. Apart from what she was required to bear and to do in these respects, Avice was made to endure much that might have been spared her. Clementina stood determinedly aloof: for Clementina, paying court to Lady Otley, found it her interest to have no connection whatever with the small human family that was about to be expatriated; drifted away to any coast, hospitable or inhospitable, that offered. Lady Otley was more repelling in her manner and speech than there seemed any need that she should be. She had never appeared to Avice the sort of person to expect any real kindness from; but the death of Miss de Burgh seemed to have brought out an amount of unkindness of which she had never dreamed. This was

particularly apparent on the day when Lady Otley delivered to her Walter Osborne's packet, re-sealed in a most satisfactory manner. His injunction respecting the manner of delivering it had entirely escaped her ladyship's recollection; but that mattered little, as she had never intended to regard it in the least.

"Mr. Walter Osborne has been at a deal of trouble, as you must be aware," said her ladyship. "I know that he has been put to great expense. The conducting your brother's funeral fell upon him entirely, and he paid everything. He is a minor, and has a limited allowance, and I trust that you will see the propriety of not encroaching on him any further. True delicacy of mind, if you possess it, will incline you to keep altogether out of his way for the future; for I assure you, that if these proceedings come to the knowledge of his family, they will be highly offended, and he will be sure to suffer. Well; you seem moved; I trust that you will be inclined to act with a becoming reserve, and some independence of spirit. You must be aware that your father's family and mine have never been on friendly terms; and, even if that had not been the case, the duty I owe to those belonging to me would deter me from burdening

myself as I may have been expected to do. If you have formed any expectation of the kind you must put it away from you."

"I have not formed any expectation that it will be necessary for me to put away," said Avice, her pale face flushing for an instant. "You mentioned just now, Lady Otley, that it was necessary we should remove from this place immediately—to-morrow, at the latest. If you have nothing further to say, I should like to consult with Mrs. Ritson at once; for the time is short, and we have much to do."

"Oh! I would not be an interruption for the world!" said Lady Otley, rising, and feeling considerably relieved; for she had expected to find Avice weak and incapable, and much more difficult to be rid of. "You understand fully that I have given up everything to you. I have even paid Miss de Burgh's funeral expenses out of my own pocket, which, in strict justice to my family, I ought not to have done. A person will come down this afternoon to value the furniture, and he will pay to you the sum he agrees to give for it. Altogether, you will have a decent provision for the present in hand; and, as far as regards the future, I cannot take upon myself to interfere at all. I have recommended

your retiring to some country town ; but, of course, you are your own mistress ; you act as you please."

This is the sum of what was said on both sides. After Lady Otley had taken leave, Avice sat long, holding in her hands—sometimes involuntarily pressing to her heart, casting away from her, and directly taking it up again,—the packet delivered to her by Lady Otley ; and which just then she could not have opened for the world. It brought vividly back to her recollection every article of furniture in poor Phillip's room of which she had taken note on the memorable day of her first and last visit ; the table at which they had both sat so joyously in the morning, and at which she had afterwards dined alone ; the book shelves running at one side of the room ; the old-fashioned escritoir, at which he had told her he so frequently sat writing ; the easy chair in which he had reclined while she bathed his throbbing temples ; the bed in which he had died. The spirit of Avice was strong, but her heart was weak, and had been sorely tried. She made an effort to go at once to Mrs. Ritson, but failed. She had gone so far as to open the door of the room, intending to pass out, but it would not do. She closed it

again ; and, retreating to the chair she had quitted, she burst into a fit of passionate weeping, that shook her delicate frame as if threatening it with dissolution.

And when the calm came at length, Avice still sat thinking over much in that latest past. What Lady Otley had said respecting Walter Osborne, recalled to her mind all that Phillip had uttered respecting him and herself ; and which he also had heard. Even as she sat there alone, brooding over these matters, the richest blood of her heart mounted up, flooding her face and neck with the deepest crimson. There was nothing she dreaded so much as another interview with Walter Osborne, although the sentiment with which he had inspired her amounted almost to reverence. For ever in the depth of her heart would dwell the remembrance of his brotherly love and kindness to Phillip ; of his delicate attention to herself, most brotherly also. In the packet which he had himself seen safely delivered, Avice had found a large handsome locket, containing one thick tress of Phillip's rich brown hair. What thought he had had for her at a time when she could not think for herself ! Avice could have fallen at his feet, and kissed them for this act ; and she

felt that, to the latest moment of her life, she must reverence him as she did now. But she must meet him no more: she knew that before Lady Otley spoke. She would write, and pour forth to him all the gratitude of her heart, and there their intercourse would end.

Avice had some difficulties to encounter with Mrs. Ritson, who was indignant with Lady Otley, and eager to tell her, as she said, a piece of her mind. Ritson remembered that Lady Otley had borrowed money from Miss de Burgh in former times; and Ritson wanted to know what had become of property belonging to her late mistress which seemed to her to have disappeared in an unaccountable manner. Suspicions of this kind only shocked Avice. She would not believe that the woman she nevertheless, despised could be dishonest in the lowest of ways. Besides, allowing that Ritson might be guessing at a truth, nothing could come of speaking to Lady Otley. So this faithful old friend was overruled; and she found it necessary to remain in her own room during Lady Otley's last interview with Avice.

The "person" mentioned by Lady Otley arrived in the afternoon, and made a valuation of the furniture, handing over to Avice at once the

sum he had himself fixed upon. It was not large, for he had declared everything to be old-fashioned, and scarcely saleable. Acting promptly, as he had been instructed to do by Lady Otley's solicitor, he said that the furniture would be removed on the following day, and so took his departure.

As yet Mrs. Ritson and Avice had not decided upon where they should go. Blanche, of course, did not enter into their counsels; and Blanche had become even more of a mere image of snow since the death of her brother and aunt. Previous to those events she would speak when spoken to; but now it was impossible to get a word from her. In other respects she remained as before, sitting in the old corner, shivering and bending over her everlasting work. Fairly afloat now on the wide sea of her troubles, Avice was compelled to defer altogether to Mrs. Ritson; and she was not so much dismayed at the prospect before her as might have been expected. She had undergone a great change altogether; and she seemed to have within her a wonderful capacity for adapting herself to circumstances. The world was no longer to her what it had been; it was now a world of broken-up homes; of places made vacant by death; of vast, dreary wastes stretching

away into some unknown future, where leading it mattered nothing. She had enjoyed life richly ; now she merely endured existence from day to day. But she endured bravely ; for at this time, in which she had neither hope nor fear on her own account, her thought and consideration for others were apparent in all she said and did.

Mrs. Ritson, on her part, had many causes for dissatisfaction and misgiving. She had entered the service of Miss de Burgh while she was yet in the flower of her age, and during many years she had been in the habit of spending her earnings upon herself. As she grew older she began to hoard ; and as her wages had been regularly paid in both services through which she had passed, she had been able, shortly before Colonel Desborough's death, to place in the hands of her only nephew, James Simpson, of the firm of Simpson and Co., drapers, of Oxford-street, who required capital to throw into the business, the sum of six hundred pounds, for which he regularly paid her interest ; not, however, expecting that the principal would at anytime be withdrawn. Knowing that money had been left to Miss de Burgh, at various times, she had an idea that her old mistress was rather rich than

otherwise; and she had not only calculated that her master's children would be decently provided for, but that a legacy would be left to herself. Therefore, the state of absolute poverty in which Miss de Burgh seemed to have died was a mystery to her; and she could not help suspecting Lady Otley, and the destitution of Avice and Blanche distressed her greatly.

"I have been thinking, my dear," she said, addressing herself to Avice, "that the best thing we can do just now will be to go at once to my nephew, James Simpson. He has often asked me to visit himself and his wife, whom I have never seen, and stop with them as long as I liked, and I have never yet accepted the invitation. I have not seen himself since he was quite young, and now he must be near forty. I wrote to him the other day, telling him it was very likely he would see me soon, and that I might bring my two children with me. You will see there what he says."

Avice took the letter that was held out to her, and read it through. It was the letter of a common-place man of business, and Avice thought the style very hard and dry; but the writer probably meant to be cordial; at all

events he said that both himself and his wife would be happy to receive herself and the young ladies whenever they could make it convenient to come. Avice refolded the letter in a slow, deliberate manner; she was evidently thinking deeply.

“Dear Nurse Ritson,” she said, giving back the letter, “it will not be right for myself and Blanche to go to Mr. Simpson’s as visitors. If we can board and lodge with him for a short time, until I find out what I am fit for in this world, it will be well. I must do something, nurse, as you know: Phillip worked hard, and why should not I, in necessity? Perhaps Mrs. or Mr. Simpson will be able to put me in some way of earning a living for myself. If Blanche and myself go with you, it must be on these terms, and with this prospect before us.”

“You are a dear, good child—you always were,” said Mrs. Ritson, with tears in her eyes. “I expected to find you very brave;—but, oh, it’s too cruel that you should be left like this!” and Nurse Ritson gave way to her grief, as she frequently had done of late, and Avice once more did her best to console her.

So it was decided that they should all proceed to Mr. Simpson’s, and hide nothing of their cir-

cumstances from him and his wife. There was little left to do in the way of packing up, as they had kept themselves in readiness for some time past; and when Mrs. Ritson, after some little demur within herself, suggested that there seemed to be no reason why they should not proceed to London at once, by the latest coach, at seven o'clock, Avise seized on the proposal with avidity. She possessed a good share of common sense, that came out strongly when there was need for it; and feeling that this last night at Hampton Court would be especially oppressive to her; that the indulgence of regret would only help to unfit her for what she had to do; this sudden call to immediate action was a great relief to her. Such a thing as deliberately setting about the removal, especially of Blanche, from this later home, endeared by many associations, was painful even to contemplate; and the excitement and hurry of this unexpected hasty departure was just what Avise needed. Mary, the one servant who had lingered with them, was despatched instantly, to see if inside places could be secured for them. She was successful; and the time only just served to get everything in readiness.

At twenty minutes to seven the little party

began to move: Mrs. Ritson walked out first, with a somewhat stately but infirm step, for she was now in her sixty-sixth year, and evidently breaking up. Avice went next, tenderly guiding the uncertain footsteps of Blanche;—Blanche, who walked as one in a dream; who had offered no resistance, and evinced no interest in these strange proceedings. Mary followed, weeping bitterly; and two men had preceded them carrying their luggage. There was a dismal light emitted from lamps placed over doorways in the passages, and by this Avice, with her dry hot eyes, took one last hurried backward look at the *one* door through which Phillip had so often passed, bringing sunshine or taking it away with him. She could not put away from her many crowding thoughts. Where now were the many friends of Miss de Burgh, who had always found welcome in her home—where even the few amongst them who had called upon herself once, and condoled with her without seeking any confidence, or asking if she needed help of any kind? What matter where! They were fitted only to bask in the sunshine—in the midst of this darkness they would have been worse than nothing.

Mary, who wept bitterly to the last, was much

consoled when Avice, with whom the act was an after-thought, wrote hurriedly with a pencil Mr. Simpson's address, and desired that she would call and see them when she was in London. Mary intended to go to town, where her parents lived, on the following day. God only knew how the disinterested attachment of this humble girl consoled Avice ; how it unconsciously cheered and strengthened her, though at the moment it caused her heart to swell with a more profound emotion of sorrow. It seemed to her an earnest that the world upon which she was entering was not destitute of kind hearts.

At nine o'clock on that night, a hackney coach, heavily laden with boxes and packages, stopped at the private door of a large shop in Oxford-street. The inscription running over the huge frontage in large gilt letters—"Simpson and Co.'s Emporium, General Drapery, Hosiery, and Millinery Establishment," was rendered plain enough by the glare of gaslights. Avice was conscious of this—of a thundering knock at the door—of the appearance of a rather slovenly maid-servant—of the sudden rushing forth of a dapper little man who seemed highly excited, and ran the fingers of both hands through his profusion of hair, causing it to bristle up as

though he were in a distracted state, and did not know what he was about—of passing with Blanche through more than one long passage, preceded by the slovenly servant; and then she found herself in a decently furnished parlour, having a gas chandelier in the centre, and a small fire burning in an old-fashioned grate. There was no one in the room, and she led Blanche to a sofa that stood on one side of the fire-place, and caused her to lie down, and taking off her own shawl wrapped her in it additionally, for Blanche shivered now, as if she suffered severely from external cold. Mrs. Ritson made her appearance presently, and walked straight to the fire, and stirred it, and made matters worse; and looked round for a coal-skuttle, and found there was none.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the dapper little man, rushing into the room in a high state of excitement, and again passing his fingers through his hair, that, in consequence of this habit, was always in a disorderly condition; “bless my soul, what a surprise this is! I’m very glad to see you, aunt; and these young ladies also. How do you do, Miss? how do *you* do? Dear me, where can Mrs. Simpson be? Now, do make yourselves comfortable. Where will you

sit, aunt? Here's an arm chair, or will you take to the sofa? Bless me, what a many years it is since we met! Makes me feel old. Oh, here's Mrs. Simpson. Betsy, this is my aunt—these are the young ladies we had advice of. Such a surprise altogether, to be sure! Now, you know, we must make them all comfortable."

If the aunt or the young ladies at all flattered themselves with the notion that Mr. Simpson had been excited merely by the surprise or pleasure of their arrival, they were very much at fault. This was Mr. Simpson's usual manner; a little exaggerated by the new call upon his attention that was a slight interruption to business matters—only a slight interruption—because he could not permit it to be anything more. Mr. Simpson was a thorough man of business; he had a talent, a passion for business; he speculated, and over speculated; and schemed, and drove, and pressed on in the race that lay before him, at a rate that made all the heads in his establishment, except one, swim again. Thackeray says of himself, "Like all great men, I have only one idea." Mr. Simpson, a great man in his way, stood in this predicament. He knew nothing beyond his business; he could not conceive that there was anything beyond it worth

knowing ; and now, while giving welcome to his old aunt, and the young strangers who accompanied her, his head was brimful of business, and his heart also ; and no impression of another kind could be made on either, beyond the surface, where it might readily be rubbed out, or allowed to remain without detriment to the more important internal arrangements. The appearance of his wife was evidently a relief to him—it was also a relief to all present.

For Mrs. Simpson was the very opposite of her husband. Business-like, also—the very soul of business, as he himself allowed—she was quiet, cold, even hard in manner and speech ; a strong, stolid, sensible woman of every-day life, who always had her wits about her, and knew how to make the best use of them. Making no fuss with the strangers, but giving them kind welcome in her own way, she put them at their ease at once, a service for which Avice could not help thanking her in her heart, as Mr. Simpson's movements of any kind were only suggestive of disarrangement and discomfort.

It was a fact that Mrs. Ritson, who, during the greater part of her life, had been brought in close contact with persons of the highest breeding, did not feel so much at home with her kin-

dred as she had expected to do. She unconsciously assumed a stately and distant manner with them, and Avice very shortly perceived that Ritson's manner towards herself and Blanche had suddenly undergone a great change. The old fond, familiar tone and manner were replaced by a studied display of the profoundest deference and respect, intended by Ritson to act as a check upon the Simpsons, who seemed to her not to be sufficiently impressed with a consciousness of the superiority of at least two of their guests. Mrs. Ritson soon made the discovery that her sister's son did not possess the hold upon her affections that Avice did—or even Blanche. Further, that even if she had wished, it would have been folly to expect to find in her nephew any particle of the sincere love for herself that she knew to exist in the heart of her adopted child.

“Perhaps you and the young ladies would like to go up stairs and take your things off at once,” said Mrs. Simpson.

“The young ladies would like to be shown to their room, if you please,” said Mrs. Ritson. “Miss Desborough is an invalid all along, and she will wish to retire at once, as the journey has fatigued her.”

Mrs. Simpson accordingly led the way out, Avice having roused Blanche, guided her as before, and Mrs. Ritson followed. The stair-cases and passages above were blazing with gas-lights; and in passing along, the new comers obtained, through half-open doors, glimpses of show-rooms, work-rooms, rooms literally crammed with bales of goods; in all of which were to be seen numbers of young women and men seated at their work, or moving busily about. Mrs. Simpson proceeded to an upper story, and showed her guests into a double-bedded room, also blazing with gas.

"I thought you would, perhaps, best like to be together," said Mrs. Simpson; "and besides, we could not well spare two rooms."

Avice hastened to thank her; she liked this arrangement best.

"Ours is a very large establishment," said Mrs. Simpson; "we employ upwards of thirty young gentlemen and ladies, and many of them sleep on the premises. They require some looking after, and my time is entirely taken up, for business, you know, must be attended to. We have also a lodger, a young gentleman who always sleeps and takes some of his meals here. He is quite a gentleman, is Mr. Musgrave; he

is serving his time with a solicitor in Lincoln's Inn. I hope you won't be at all disturbed. Everything here is conducted very quietly, though there's so many people. There is generally somebody sitting up all night in the work-rooms, but you'll hear nothing of them. Is there anything I can do for you just now?"

They thanked her, and said "No."

"Here is a bell," said Mrs. Simpson, pointing it out; "if you want anything, you have only to ring. Perhaps, miss," addressing Avice, "when the young lady has laid down, you would like to look over the rooms below? It's curious to people who have never seen anything of the sort. We've some very handsome fashions just making up, but you must see the show-rooms by daylight. You'll be able to find your way down to the first floor, and I shall see when you come."

Left to themselves, Mrs. Ritson assisted Avice to put Blanche to bed. Both spoke to her in the caressing tone that they would have used to a child; and of late Blanche had not shrunk from these attentions as she used to do. She had not been laid down long before they knew from her regular breathing that she was in a profound sleep.

As Blanche always slept soundly, they ventured to leave her. During the little conversation that passed between them, both acknowledged that they liked Mrs. Simpson's manner better than her husband's. Avice marvelled at the extent of the place, and the busy life in it. It was something altogether new to her.

"It is indeed a great concern, and I hope James is not overdoing himself," said Mrs. Ritson. "I don't like his unquiet ways. I remember now, that in every letter I have received from him of late years, he has always spoken of wanting capital to throw into the business. Well, my dear, you would like to look over the rooms, you say; I'll go and have a talk with Mr. Simpson. I hope, dear, you won't have your feelings hurt; you must remember that the young men and women don't know who you are."

"Oh, Nurse Ritson!" cried Avice, bowing her face in her hands, and bursting into a passionate flood of tears; "how can I feel anything of that kind just now, when my heart is nearly broken?"

"My poor child."

"And, dear nurse," continued Avice, when the burst of grief had had its way, "do promise

that you will not make too much of me yourself : you only make me feel uneasy, and I wish to fall readily into my future place. I have no pretensions with which these people can have anything to do ; I wish to seek employment amongst them. You will remember all this, nurse ?”

Mrs. Ritson promised, falteringly, and with tears in her eyes. All this was very hard to her ; she was more than ever proud of Avice, and for her. Who might ever know, as she did, how nobly the high-born young girl had borne herself in the midst of her great trial ?

Mrs. Simpson met Avice on the lower floor, and conducted her over the various rooms. She watched the young women at their work, and listened with interest to Mrs. Simpson’s account of the different ways in which they were employed. She thought she might easily learn some branches of the business—the millinery, for instance. Would she be able by it to keep herself and Blanche ?—she, who, if Blanche had not been there to be provided for, would have found it so hard to make a struggle for herself ; would have found it so pleasant to be allowed to lie down and die !

She was occupied with these speculations,

when, after stealing back for a minute to look at Blanche, she joined the party in the parlour. The cloth was laid and the table spread for supper, and the supper consisted of an immense piece of boiled beef, apple pie, and cheese. Mr. Simpson was conversing with his aunt, and tumbling his hair about at a furious rate when she entered. He started up, placed chairs at the table, seated the ladies, and then took his place opposite Mrs. Simpson.

“For what we are going to receive,” said Mr. Simpson. “Ladies, what will you take? sorry we’ve nothing better to-night, but you see we didn’t know you was coming. Ah! (he frequently uttered this interjection, drawing a deep breath as he did so). The young lady will take apple pie, Mrs. Simpson. Thought there was two young ladies. Eh?—Oh! Sorry to hear it, I’m sure. Bad thing to be ill. I never could find time to be ill.”

“I think you are in a fair way of making yourself ill, James,” said his aunt.

“He does almost worry himself to death,” said his wife, surveying him with her quiet, steady eyes. “He was always over-anxious;—you see it’s his natural disposition, and he can’t help it, and this is a great concern to have to think for.”

“ Ah !” sighed Mr. Simpson. “ What I want, you see, aunt, is capital to throw into the concern. With more capital I could make this one of the first-rate businesses in London. It’s a terrible thing to have your hands tied when you see where you could make a good move. Porter, aunt—ale ? Miss ? —Oh, you take water.”

It was an especially unpleasant thing to sit with Mr. Simpson at meals. His hurried manner and speech ; his evident absence of mind ; his sudden starts and odd motions of many kinds, were well calculated to throw a nervous person into convulsions, and to take any body’s breath away. Any body’s except his wife’s. There she sat, strong and stolid as ever ; not in the least affected by all this hurry and skurry, or imagining that any one else could be so. Avice began to feel a little excited ; she found it difficult to swallow. There was a ring at the front door.

“ That’s Mr. Musgrove’s ring,” said Mrs. Simpson.

“ Eh ? Oh, yes ; that’ll be him. He’s in early to night ; he’ll want supper. You’ll find him a perfect gentleman, aunt—and you, Miss ; a complete gentleman ; fit for any society in the land.

“That he is, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Simpson, “and of course he does keep the very best of company. I’m sure I shall be grieved when he goes, for the only recreation Mr. Simpson ever has is talking to him at nights. He’s so affable and pleasant.”

Mrs. Ritson glanced uneasily at Avice ; but Avice was thinking that it would be a great relief to see Mr. Simpson engaged in any kind of recreation. Mr. Musgrove entered the room rather noisily, and was brought to a stop by being introduced to Mr. Simpson’s aunt and Miss Desborough. He had never heard of either ladies before, but he bowed condescendingly.

“I say, Simpson,” said the young gentleman, throwing himself on the sofa, after giving a violent pull at the bell-rope, “that governor of mine is just such another driving old fogey as you are. Here have I been all this blessed day tramping about the City, and I’m just used up. I know the other governor at home will presently be saying I shall ruin him in boot-leather. Sarah, my love,” addressing the maid servant, who had just brought a pair of slippers and a boot-jack, “I shall not forget to remember you in my will.”

"Hold your soft!" cried Sarah. "And I think you might have waited till I came, and not pulled the bell like that, nearly off its injines. You're always so unpatient, you are."

"And Sarah, my darling," continued Mr. Musgrove, "be sure and tell Bob to give my boots an extra polish, for I'm going to see a young lady in the morning."

"Tell him yourself," said Sarah.

"Ah, I forgot you'd be jealous. Never mind, I'll come down presently and explain everything to your satisfaction."

"If you come into our kitchen you'll have the dishcloth in your face, I can tell you."

"You two are always chaffing," said Mrs. Simpson. "Sarah, be quiet."

"Tell *him* to be quiet then," said Sarah; "who's going to stand his nonsense all along?"

"Sarah can give back as good as you send her, I think," said Mr. Simpson, who laughed and seemed really to enjoy the scene.

"Sarah has the divinest of tempers," said Mr. Musgrove, as the girl flounced out of the room; "nevertheless there are some slight drawbacks to my thinking seriously of her. Supper? yes; I think I can eat something, though I swallowed two-dozen oysters not an hour ago, and lots of

brandy-and-water. But I'm fairly used up, you know ;—never was so tired in my life, I give you my honour."

Mr. Musgrove took his seat at the table. He was accustomed to be made much of by the Simpsons ; he knew that they rather looked up to him as a genteel person ; that they appreciated him as a very originally witty person. No one except himself, as Mrs. Simpson frequently declared, could make Mr. Simpson laugh. He looked round the table now, and wondered whether, tired as he was, it was at all worth his while to make himself agreeable. The old aunt went for nothing, of course, but he presently discovered that the young lady was pretty. "Deuced pretty," said Mr. Musgrove to himself, "I'll make up to her." Miserable mistake ! How many amongst us, in our various ways, commit mistakes as deplorable — and how often !

"I say, Simpson," said Mr. Musgrove, "I played a capital joke upon our governor the other day. He hates smoking, you must understand, but is an inveterate snuff taker. Well, I and another, with the help of a bit of string, made a sort of fringe of some good shag tobacco, and tied it round his hat, trusting that, as he is not

always wide-awake, he would not see it. Well, I'm blessed if he didn't put that hat on and walk right from Lincoln's Inn to Pall Mall with it! But, hadn't we a row afterwards! of course nobody knew anything about it. You should have seen how demure I looked."

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson, and he laughed quite heartily. Mrs. Simpson laughed too, observing though, that it was too bad.

"I wish *I* was capital," said the weary Mr. Musgrove; "though in that case I suppose you would be for throwing me into the business."

Mr. Simpson was immensely tickled by this sally, and nearly choked himself. It is enough for our purpose that we have given a sample of Mr. Musgrove's general style, and his capabilities as a wit. He kept on in the same strain during supper, and was just, according to his own belief, about to "come out strong," when he was suddenly checked by Mrs. Ritson, who rose from the table, and in her most stately manner observed that Miss Desborough would like to retire. Mr. Musgrove protested against losing their company so soon; but something was going forward that he did not exactly understand, and he found himself at fault. When the two ladies had

retired, accompanied by Mrs. Simpson, he observed to his landlord that that old aunt of his would have made a good Czarina of all the Russias.

And then Mr. Simpson, rather proud of his aunt in the main, especially after observing the impression she had produced on so decidedly genteel a person as Mr. Musgrove, proceeded to inform that personage of the fact of her having lived nearly all her life in the very highest families; so that her manner, cold and stately as it was, must be the correct thing. The visit of the two Misses Desborough to himself and his wife was something to be still more vain of; and this weak side of his character getting the better of him, he made the most of it; giving a genealogical account of the Desborough and De Burgh families that would have astonished Avice considerably if she had heard it. It so chanced that Mr. Musgrove had a slight acquaintance with young Lord Otley (of what nature did not appear), and he became highly interested. On Mrs. Simpson's return to the parlour this conversation was continued; and she, as well as her husband, could not avoid remarking the impression produced on their gentleman-lodger by these revelations. In fact, Mr.

Musgrove was a little disconcerted ; he felt that if he had previously been made acquainted with the rank of one amongst his audience, he should certainly have adopted another style.

Avice was divided betwixt her gratitude to Ritson, for cutting short the proceedings of the evening, and her dread of offending the Simpsons. Young as she was, she possessed the true greatness that can bow to circumstances, and rise above them at the same time. She did not, to begin with, entertain that profound contempt for traders that especially distinguishes a large mass of persons who glorify themselves on some small pretensions to gentility ; and she was not, like Mrs. Ritson, on the alert to discover what was offensive. Yet whatever was offensive to good taste or feeling was peculiarly painful to Avice ; not merely because she had all her life been accustomed to the society of persons of the highest possible polish, but because her own nature, with its high tendencies to whatever was noble, and earnest, and true, was inevitably readily shocked and repelled by all that was merely vapid and vulgar. Within her own class she had encountered weak heads as well as cold hearts ; but she did now miss greatly the outward ease, and refinement, and

courtesy to which she had been accustomed, in addition to much more that she had missed long before coming into contact with the Simpsons.

That night, contrary to his usual practice, Mr. Simpson retired to rest at the same time with his wife. Generally he was up half the night, poring over his books, and scheming for the time to come. He had been excited and interrupted; and when he came to review the whole matter quietly, he did not like the look of it.

"I've had a talk with my aunt, to-night, Betsy," he said; "and I find from what she says that there's nothing more to be expected from her. You know how I always reckoned on her leaving us something more. These great folks turn out to be as poor as church-mice, and I don't see the use of such greatness. My aunt don't seem to consider that I have a right to feel disappointed. I shouldn't be at all surprised to find that she has made a will leaving the six hundred pounds to these Desboroughs. You see how much she makes of them. What are the Desboroughs to us, I should like to know? What do they come here for?"

"It's a queer concern altogether, I'm afraid,"

said Mrs. Simpson. "The young lady that was down to supper has been asking me if we could accommodate her and her sister with board and lodging for a little time. I told her I couldn't say till I'd consulted you. We might spare that one room, and they must have some means. I've been thinking that with their connection they might bring us business."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Simpson, tumbling his hair again, "I'm afraid not. My aunt is very close on the subject, and I don't like the look of it. Mind, if they do stop here they must pay beforehand—a quarter in advance always—and pay well."

"I'll take care of that. I've been thinking of eighty pounds a-year for the two: we couldn't make it worth while to take less. Then there's the chance of the connection. What do you say?"

"Do as you like. Only mind you have the pay beforehand. Ah! if I only had capital to throw into the business!"

CHAPTER X.

ON the following day Avice was informed that she and her sister could be accommodated with board and lodging on the terms that Mr. and Mrs. Simpson had agreed to take; and she gladly paid the quarter in advance. This was a great relief to her; during the three months she would have time to look about her, and consider what was best to be done. She sat down at once, and wrote a long letter to her married sister. Clementina was seven years older than herself, and she appealed to her for advice as to what she had best do; giving her an account of all that had recently occurred, and requesting that she would not communicate the address to any one. A certain misgiving respecting Clementina prevented Avice asking her outright to come and see them; but in her own delicate and tender way, tears blinding her eyes as she wrote the words, she declared how happy such

a visit would make herself. Then she wrote to Walter Osborne, telling him all that her grateful heart dictated, and bidding him a farewell that in this world might be final. There was no third person to whom she could write, and when her task was finished she sat down to think.

At any rate she would have to make a great struggle for herself; and she knew very well that she and Blanche must in the future occupy a much more humble lodging than the present. Mrs. Ritson considered Mrs. Simpson's terms to be high, and was indignant, but did not know what to do. Indeed the great distress of mind that Mrs. Ritson had undergone of late had considerably shaken her intellect as well as health; and Avice had the added grief of knowing that her kind old nurse was being ill-repaid for services to which she had devoted the greater portion of her life. Ritson had become extremely irritable and nervous, and could not bear to listen to any of Avice's plans. She seemed to cling to a hope that Providence itself would shortly interfere in behalf of her two children.

The Desboroughs did not prove to be troublesome lodgers. Avice and Mrs. Ritson took

their meals with the family ; and Avice always waited upon Blanche, who never quitted her room. The two passed nearly all their time with Blanche, seated at a window that overlooked the busy street, while Blanche sat in a corner working at her old work. Meeting Mr. Musgrove frequently at breakfast and supper, Avice noticed a very agreeable change in his whole manner and bearing, he being now perfectly quiet and respectful. She also observed much that occasioned her astonishment. For instance, the everlasting toiling and moiling of the Simpsons, which did not, according to their own avowal, produce for themselves more than a bare living from day to day, besides keeping a constant dread of failure before their eyes. All Mr. Simpson's tossing and tumbling of his hair ; his busy days and anxious nights ; his wife's indefatigable labour in every department of the business requiring her attention ; all the united labour of the thirty young ladies and gentlemen, who were never allowed to be idle for a moment, produced nothing better than this. And the Simpsons had no children, yet could not procure for themselves any of the comforts of home. Their meals were hurried, and liable to interruption ; the parlour was furnished scantily

with just such things as served for use; everything with the Simpsons gave way to business; and business apparently was not accommodating to them. While Avice was noticing all this, the Simpsons noticed that their new lodgers never had any visitors.

A month passed, during which Avice's heart sank daily. She had not heard from her sister, and scarcely expected to hear from her now. With a forlorn hope that her first letter had miscarried, she wrote again; addressing as before to Lieutenant Renshaw at his quarters; but she did not this time allow herself to wait anxiously day by day for a reply. The hour had arrived in which she must exert herself, and she determined to apply to Mrs. Simpson for employment at once.

The Simpsons were rather annoyed than astonished. Mrs. Simpson entered into explanations. In the work-rooms they did not employ any except first-rate hands; such as had the business to learn were of no use to them. There was no plain work. Even as a mere shop-girl to serve behind the counter, Avice was not the sort of person to be of use. Besides, they were not just then in want of an extra hand. * Avice was quite prepared to do anything;

though she would greatly have preferred the work-room to the shop.

This readiness of Miss Desborough's to serve in any capacity, evidently springing from necessity, was mentioned one evening to Mr. Musgrove, who while professing to admire the young lady's spirit, let in a new light on the subject.

"What a brick she is!" said that young gentleman. "I like her for it. And by Jove only think what a sensation her appearance behind the counter would produce with proper management! The great-granddaughter of some old Lord Otley; the cousin of the present lord; the daughter of Colonel Desborough, the last descendant of a great old family! Only make these facts generally known, and your shop will be thronged with visitors. I myself know scores of young men who would be customers in the hosiery line, just to get a peep at her. Old boy, I advise you to think of it."

"It might answer in that way," said Mrs. Simpson, thoughtfully. "To be sure we could make room for her any day by getting rid of one of the girls. What do you think of it, Simpson?"

Simpson was considering; tumbling his hair about in all directions. It had struck him that

there might be something in this. It would be worth a trial, at all events. If the circumstance got noised about it might reach the ears of the Otley family; and they, not liking the disgrace to themselves, might do something better for their young relatives. Looking at the matter in this light, Mr. Simpson began to feel very benevolently inclined. Yes, he would do all in his power to help the young ladies. Speaking at length, he asked Mr. Musgrove if he was serious in his offers to help *him*. Mr. Musgrove protested that he was, adding, "Make capital of her, my boy; throw her into the business."

And so, as a sort of capital, Avice was thrown into the business. Quite unconscious of the speculations of others respecting her; bravely resolved to earn a livelihood by any honest means that offered; she entered upon her employment, not allowing to be apparent to any the trepidation that seized upon her, when first informed that she might act as shop-woman if she liked. Confused, abashed, trembling in every limb, yet by a strong effort forcing her attention to all that lay before her to do, Avice got through her first day, and many days that were like the first; and reasoned with Mrs. Ritson, who nearly sunk under the shock of

seeing her young mistress so degraded ; and bore patiently the great pain to her of knowing how much Blanche would miss her from hour to hour. She was labouring for a purpose—a great purpose—the securing a shelter for Blanche. She laboured on with a willing heart, though harder effort lay before her—though she knew that at no distant future this most distasteful occupation would fail her, as a means of procuring what was needed for the support of her sister and herself. Her own board and lodging was the price of her services ; but Blanche remained to be provided for. Forty pounds a-year for Blanche ! and then clothing for both ! How was it to be accomplished ? If it was, indeed, an error in Colonel Desborough to marry early, and without means as he did, the error was being expiated ; but not in a way that mortal eyes like to contemplate. God himself permitted the error to be ; forgave it ; left open a broad path for the influx of human mercy ; but the path remained a desert. Trodden by no friendly foot ; choked up with weeds of rank growth ; parched with fervid heat ; desolated by wind and rain ; and darkened by clouds, amid which thunder rolled and lightning flashed ; the solitary wanderers therein found such portion in

as man—not God—had decreed them. If humanity does not like to contemplate a picture like this, it is a serious consideration—not whether it *ought*, but whether it *need*, to have a conspicuously assigned place in the world.

As a means of bringing business to the concern, Avice acted well for a time—a long time to her, though she was mercifully allowed to act in the dark. Young ladies as well as gentlemen, presently flocked to see her: persons of both sexes and all ages had the curiosity to frequent the shop on her account. Apart from any other attraction, she was of herself well worth looking at, with her delicate features and exquisitely fair complexion, her slight, graceful figure, and gentle speech, and courteous bearing. Any except herself would have felt highly flattered at being so much in request; and she was not displeased at finding herself always busy. In the shop and amongst customers she had the satisfaction of believing that she was taken only for what she appeared to be; and like her aunt De Burgh, she could only see actual degradation in what was in itself dishonourable. As she was, she could hope that Phillip saw her, knowing that he would approve of all that she had done. Hereafter, Walter Osborne might learn through

what trial she had passed, and he also would not honour her the less. Fenced about by this true dignity, and the consciousness of her own rectitude of purpose, Avice stood her ground with a serene conscience and a brave heart; making as light as possible of the severe punishment that this daily life, nevertheless, was to her of itself.

When Avice had been five months in the shop, her pale face had become paler, her slight figure still more slight. Except that she occasionally attended a neighbouring church on Sunday, she had never once been out of the house. Anxiety, too, was doing its work with her. During that time she had had returned to her the last letter sent to her sister, bearing on it the words—"Gone to India." Clementina, then, had deserted her altogether; left her to struggle with difficulty as she best might. This was a severe blow to her, though she had not expected to receive much sympathy from this quarter. Here, too, was something degrading even to herself. It was painful to have to make excuses for her sister before Ritson; painful to know that the old nurse had never anticipated anything better of Clementina. Another anxiety was the evidently failing health of

che—Blanche whom she was compelled to neglect in order that the two might live. Her purse was becoming exhausted, for she had just paid a third quarter in advance for Blanche. Mrs. Ritson tottered about, and muttered to herself, and still dreamed that something was about to happen that would set everything right.

The something did *not* happen ; and one night, while sitting at Blanche's bed-side, during Mrs. Ritson's absence below, it occurred to her that she had better at once summon courage to open the packet sent to her by Walter Osborne. Hitherto she had regarded the contents as something sacred, and her heart failed her now, as she sat contemplating the black seals that had been supplied by Lady Otley. She felt that she had a shock to encounter and get over—a first sight of the money that had been the price of poor Phillip's effects,—his furniture, his books, whatever else had been his. Her emotions altogether were of a heart-crushing kind. This money, so cruelly obtained, was now to be applied to the relief of her necessities, and it could only go a little way. While breaking the seals, it struck her, for the first time, that there might be a letter for her inside ;—but no : a purse—the two notes for fifty pounds each. She held these in her hands for an instant, dropped them :

and burying her face in the bed-clothes, she long and hysterically.

Sorrow, and affection, and gratitude, were struggling for mastery in her heart as she thus wept. Even she, with her little knowledge of such matters, could not help feeling assured that Walter Osborne had added greatly to the sum actually obtained by the sale of her brother's small property. How kind, how generous and delicate, had been the conduct of this true friend of Phillip's throughout ! and if Phillip had lived she would have known more of this friend ; she might have seen him often. Never had she been in her heart so inclined to murmur :—the lost happiness was so great—the desolation to which she had been left was so great also !

Avice, richer than she expected to find herself, was still poor. She knew well that she must look out for some different kind of occupation ; that it would be necessary to remove her sister to a poorer lodging. And all this would have to be explained to Ritson, who could not bear such explanations ; who would only become more fretful and irritable on understanding that Avice contemplated taking a step lower as to outward circumstances. What had to be done, however, must be done ;—so Avice thought : but it was decreed otherwise.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. MUSGROVE, who was greatly inclined to be idle and dissipated ; who hated governors in general, and had an idea, respecting governors in particular, that they were made to be imposed upon ; who had no particular capacity of his own to boast of ; but who possessed the one redeeming quality of good nature ; had his intervals of earnest thought, his flashes of true feeling ; and at times, even with companions of his own stamp, he could show to far better advantage as a man than he had done on the night that first introduced him to the acquaintance of Avice. This was the case on a particular day when, his governor being out, he and his two brother clerks embraced the opportunity of being especially communicative and busy on their own accounts. In a small room adjoining the office occupied by these young gentlemen, the door of which stood apart, sat a middle-aged

man of an especially grave demeanour, who had called once before, in company with Mr. Raikes, the managing clerk to a firm of solicitors in the City ; the identical managing clerk of whom Charles Moore had spoken as being a friend of own. Calling now alone, and finding that Mr. Travis was not in, but expected every moment, the grave man chose to wait till he made his appearance. And it may be taken as a proof that there was nothing particular about him to excite attention or command respect, when we add that the young gentlemen forgot him altogether shortly after he had seated himself, and pursued the conversation that his arrival had interrupted.

“ I wish, Musgrove,” said one of the clerks, who was a new arrival, “ that you would give me all the particulars from the beginning. I’m not acquainted with them as Blake is, and I can’t so easily follow you.”

Thereupon, Mr. Musgrove, who was speaking of Avice, commenced giving an account of the manner of his first becoming acquainted with her ; of the information respecting her afforded by Mr. Simpson ; of the whole manner of her introduction to the shop ; of her demeanour there, and the comments that had been made upon

her ; of her entire devotion to the sister whom he had never seen, and to the old nurse whom he never should forget ; and then—what then ?

“ So you see,” continued Mr. Musgrove, who had glanced at his own impressions as he went along, “ when one night Mr. Simpson told me that it was all up with the Desboroughs, that they had come to their last penny, and could no longer remain in his house, I was not at all surprised. Simpson was sorry—on his own account, mind you—for Miss Avice had brought him business, and he knew it ; but his curmudgeonly soul would not allow him to believe that it would be to his advantage to keep both sisters, though that was true. So they were to go ; Simpson didn’t care where they went, no more did his wife ;—they care for nothing but pounds, shillings, and pence, those two ;—but lo ! one fine day Miss Desborough falls into a fit ; and the doctor is called in ; and Miss Avice has to think of her and wait on her ; and the old nurse goes about the house wringing her hands ; and the Simpsons are at their wits’ end. ‘ Who’s to pay for this doctoring and their keep ? ’ cries Mr. Simpson ; and the answer is prompt payment for everything on the part of Miss Avice. Some little hoard with which she saw fit to go

away from a losing concern is now being swallowed up by this new mishap ; and by the time Miss Desborough dies—for the doctor says she can't live—Miss Avice will probably be left penniless. By Jove, she's a noble girl ! and if I wasn't poor and dependent as I am, in spite of being the good-for-nothing fellow I am, I'd help her out of her trouble, and out of the clutches of those Simpsons, and set her afloat, without letting her know how it all happened. That's what *I* should like to do."

The conversation went on, and the stranger, listening intently, heard every word. Presently Mr. Travis came in, and just glancing at his clerks, who appeared to be very industrious, he passed into his own room with the stranger. The latter at length took his departure ; the day wore on ; and in the evening, when Mr. Musgrove found himself at liberty to depart, he was undecided as to how he should dispose of the spare time that lay before him. Should he go to the theatre ?—should he go to Willis's rooms, where some jolly fun was going on ?—should he—he had not yet got out of Lincoln's-inn, when his cogitations were interrupted by finding a hand placed upon his shoulder. He turned and recognised the grave man who had waited for Mr. Travis in the morning.

"I say, no business out of business hours," remonstrated Mr. Musgrove.

"If you are thinking of law business I am not," said the grave man. "Do you think that you have a spare hour to bestow upon one who is a stranger in this place, and whom it is in your power to oblige at perhaps no great inconvenience to yourself?"

"I'm your man," said Mr. Musgrove. "What is it?"

"You were speaking of a young lady this morning."

"Eh? Oh, you listened, did you?"

"I did."

"Well, I don't know that I said anything that any one mightn't hear."

"Certainly not. Much that you said pleased me. You are not heartless; and there is always hope of the possessor of a heart, even amid much folly."

Mr. Musgrove was a little embarrassed: he had half a mind to be offended. Looking this stranger full in the face by aid of the gas-light, he was struck with its strange expression. Since the morning he had learned his name and calling. He was a Mr. Thorpe, of Moorlands, Yorkshire, and was connected in some way with the Burnham mine. Business connected with

the mine had brought him to London. He was respectable, therefore; he was probably very eccentric. What he had heard respecting Avice had evidently interested him, and perhaps he wished to befriend her. It might be that he had some previous knowledge of her or her family. Altogether, Mr. Musgrove considered it best to pocket the affront to himself, and devote the remainder of the evening to Mr. Thorpe, if necessary.

And now, at Mr. Thorpe's request, he repeated all that he had said respecting Avice in the morning; replying to Mr. Thorpe's frequent questions in a manner that brought out further information. Mr. Thorpe also made himself acquainted with the character of the Simpsons. Good enough people, Mr. Musgrove said, but incapable of thinking of anything except the main chance.

"Do you think that I could procure board and lodging with these people for a short time?"

"Not a doubt of it: if you only offer to pay well, they'll stow you somewhere."

"Then you can do me a service: introduce me as a friend, and leave me to make terms with them. I have especial reasons for wishing to cultivate the acquaintance of these young ladies. Do you agree?"

"I see no reasons for objecting," said Mr. Musgrove. "I hope there are none why I should."

"I don't at all object to your demurring a little," said Mr. Thorpe. "I am a stranger to you, and after what I have said you have a right to inquire into my motives. Here is my card. If you inquire respecting me at Frost and Dalton's you will learn all about me."

"Oh, I know all that," said Mr. Musgrove.

"As to my motives," continued Mr. Thorpe, "although I have never heard of these young ladies before in my life, and know nothing of their connections, I feel interested in their welfare; I wish to help them, if I find that it is in my power. That is all."

"That'll do," said Mr. Musgrove. "Come along with me; and God speed you, I say."

Mr. Musgrove was privately resolved that his new acquaintance should find accommodation with the Simpsons at any price. He would give up his own room to Mr. Thorpe for the short time that he would require it, and himself sleep anywhere—on the sofa, on a bale of cotton—he didn't care. He would let the Simpsons know how rich Mr. Thorpe was (somehow he had himself an idea that Mr. Thorpe was rich; perhaps because the latter was connected with a

mine, for a mine is suggestive of riches). There was no inconvenience to which he could not have submitted with the object in view of securing a friend for the young Desboroughs. Perhaps some recording angel took note in Mr. Musgrove's favour of this and several other acts of disinterested kindness of which he thought nothing himself. The result was, that Mr. Thorpe took up his abode with the Simpsons. He was a quiet, orderly lodger, who, seemingly having nothing to do—a circumstance that bore out the idea of his wealth—stopped a good deal in the house, reading books, or when he could, having a chat with Mrs. Ritson. He took greatly to Mrs. Ritson; and she, with her intellect that grew feebler every day, and her accumulating troubles, with which she did not know how to deal, was thankful to find sympathy, and presently opened her heart to him. Sometimes, but very rarely, he saw Avice; and at such times, though no one noted the circumstance, there was a sudden kindling of his mask-like countenance into life. He evinced an interest in the sick young lady, and held private consultations with the doctor. The Simpsons in their turn called upon him for sympathy, and he gave it. He wished with all his heart that

Mr. Simpson could find capital to throw into the business. He allowed that it would be too bad if, after all, Mrs. Ritson bequeathed her six hundred pounds to the daughters of her late master. He hoped with them that their strange lodgers might not eventually put them to expense. Mr. Thorpe became a general favourite. He evidently had an abundance of money. He ordered and sent in poultry and fish, and paid for it, in addition to paying the charge agreed upon for his board. The everlasting beef of the establishment did not suit him. He made himself quite at home, and took Mr. Simpson's place at the head of the table, in order to leave that gentleman quite at liberty in case he was wanted. He took care that the young ladies, both invalids in his opinion, had variety of diet. He made handsome presents to Sarah, and that sharp-witted young person soon discovered that the best way of pleasing Mr. Thorpe was paying extra attention to the young ladies up-stairs. Presently he sent in jellies, and fruit, and wine, though he drank none himself; and every one in the establishment, except Avice, soon understood that all this was done in consideration of the invalid. Mrs. Ritson was silently gratified and grateful: a load of trouble seemed removed

for, though the oppression was there, the gratitude first found voice. Mrs. Ritson supplied all the links that were wanting in the chain of evidence. She herself looked upon Mr. Thorpe, and described him to Avice, as an extraordinarily benevolent man, of middle age and immense wealth, who probably having no near relative, devoted his life to doing good, and found delight in it. Surveying him in this light; knowing—none could know better—what exquisite happiness the power of helping those who need help and deserve it may confer, Avice felt relieved and not the less grateful. She sent a message to Mr. Thorpe, requesting an interview with him alone. And they met; those two whose natures were so opposite, and yet so readily to be brought together through the agency of what was eternally true in both.

After this interview, Mr. Thorpe became more openly identified with the Desboroughs. With the permission of Avice, he sometimes accompanied the doctor in his visits to Blanche, whose extraordinary malady, with the supposed cause of which he had become acquainted through the communicativeness of Mrs. Ritson, interested him deeply. Blanche was in a strange state of hovering between life and death. Evincing less

consciousness of what was around her than ever ; being, to touch and to look upon, colder and whiter than ever ; Avice, who rarely quitted her bedside, was frequently alarmed ; and now, in lieu of summoning Mrs. Ritson, or any one beside her, she summoned Mr. Thorpe. In this great matter to her, she had begun to rely upon him more than upon any one else about her ; and Mr. Thorpe was always at hand ; he entered the room, and approached the bed noiselessly and reverently, and tenderly touched the cheek and hands that were white as snow, and as cold, and marked the beat of the pulse, always low and fitful, and summoned other help if he saw it was required. By degrees, he lengthened these visits ; and it first occurred to Mr. Thorpe that, though to all appearance dead, the faculties of the spirit within might be on the alert, and need ministering to. On the occasion of one of these visits to Blanche, he took up a Bible, and commenced reading aloud. On coming to a sudden stop, he looked towards Blanche, as did Avice and Mrs. Ritson. Blanche, who had been lying with her eyes closed, opened them, and slowly raised her hand, that dropped again heavily. Mr. Thorpe looked towards Avice, who had fallen upon her knees at the bedside ; and

he read on; and when he clasped the cold hand in parting, it slightly returned his pressure.

After this, Mr. Thorpe read at Blanche's bedside every day; and the hitherto inanimate figure began to exhibit more decided signs of life. How Avice reproached herself for having never read aloud, supposing that Blanche was deaf as well dumb! How much more than ever she felt grateful to Mr. Thorpe, and looked up to him! How desolate, how forlorn her situation altogether would have been if she had not met with him! Now that she knew Blanche must die, it was a great consolation to know also that she had been allowed every human help.

At length Blanche spoke. It was for the first time since Phillip's death; and when this change took place, the shadow of death had fallen upon herself. It was about ten o'clock in the morning, and only Avice was in the room with her. Her first words were—"Nurse Ritson—Mr. Thorpe—send for them." Avice started up as if she had been electrified, and approached the bed, and bent over Blanche, and spoke to her; but alarmed at the change that had passed over her face, as if in an instant of time, she summoned her two friends at once;

and they came, and all gathered round the dying girl.

“I have so much to say,” gasped Blanche, “and so little time! Let me clasp your hand, sister Avice—let me tell you how much I have always loved you! My father, Phillip—dear, kind Phillip!—my aunt—all died, and I was not allowed to say to them what I now say to you—what I longed to say, and could not! You all knew how that terrible time changed me; but none knew how keenly I could feel—I that neither spoke nor made sign!”

“Alas! with how much I have to reproach myself!” said Avice, weeping bitterly.

“No, no! you were always good and kind, Avice! Will you weep so? Then I cannot tell you all; and I wish to tell all now while I can. I would not have you think of me always as the dead, dumb, heartless thing I have seemed to be!”

“Blanche, Blanche, do not break my heart! We knew how strongly you could feel—how much you loved us; we saw it in your eyes long ago—always!”

“But you did not, could not know,” said Blanche, who poured out her words with a strange power and rapidity, “what intense joy,

what agonising sorrow, filled my heart whenever you so looked on me as Phillip looked when I saw him last—so tenderly, so sadly ! You did not know how I yearned to hear you speak to me at those times—to hear you speak earnestly and long, believing that my heart could respond to all you said ! You did not know how ungrateful I often was, how frequently inclined to murmur, to tax you all with unkindness ! The remembrance of all this weighs heavily on me now. I cannot die till I have confessed my sin. Avice, my sister, say you forgive me before I go !”

“I have nothing to forgive ;—it is I that should ask forgiveness !” said Avice, her tears falling fast on the cold hand she was clasping. “You must say that you forgive *me*, Blanche, darling sister, whom I know too late !”

“Do not say too late !—do not say that you were ever other than loving and kind to me. Oh, how considerate you all were ! I see it all now ; and what a sorrow I was to you all after that dreadful time ! Nurse Ritson, do not weep so bitterly. I do not fear to die ; and it is better for me that I should go. You, too, were always good and kind to me. Let me kiss and thank you now, whilst I can.”

Blanche threw her arms round Mrs. Ritson’s

neck, and kissed her again and again ; but the old nurse was completely overpowered, and could only weep silently. Then Blanche drew her sister's pale, tearful face towards her, and for a few moments it seemed as if she must die in that clinging embrace. All the love that had lain in her heart so long without finding expression seemed to gush forth now.

" You remember, then, that dreadful time of which you spoke, dear ?" said Mr. Thorpe, who, except that his lips quivered a little, betrayed no sign of emotion.

" I have always been present at it," said Blanche, slightly shivering again. " I knew that my mother was dead ; I was taken to look at her for the last time. It was not intended that I should see more ; but they did not know how much I loved my mother ! You, Avice, who never saw her, how much *you* would have loved her !"

Avice could only weep on ; she felt as if her heart was about to burst.

" Sister, raise my head.—I distrusted all those people ; I watched them—listened to what they said. Our servants would not tell me anything. My father was shut up in his cabin overwhelmed with grief. At night I escaped those who had

care of me, and hid myself in the place where I knew my mother lay. I saw all. I crept up the stairs after them, and hid myself on the deck. My father was there. The funeral service was read; and then, what was it they flung into the great deep? I knew—I, whose blood was changing into ice with the horror! Those who stood there heard a long, loud scream of agony, and they found me; but I was no longer what I had been. For weeks afterwards I neither stirred nor spoke; and from that night until now, I have never been able to give utterance to a complete sentence. I *was* literally frozen¹ with the horror, Avice. I had no power of speech left, or of action. To say yes or no, caused me great pain. It was a pain to me to move about—to see others move. I could not help shrinking from all who were strange to me. Yet in this frozen state, how keen was my consciousness of all that passed! How terrible was my helplessness to me sometimes!—when my father died!—when Phillip died! Oh, Avice, how much I loved Phillip—(How wonderfully strong was her grasp of the hand she held as she said this!)—when my aunt died—she who was so good and noble! Believe that I, too, have suffered, loving as I did, seeing, hearing, under-

standing all as I did ! And, oh, Avice, my sister, how my heart has bled for you !”

Mr. Thorpe, kneeling at the bedside, commencing reading, in a low, distinct tone, a chapter of St. John. The sound of human grief was hushed instantaneously, and a holy quiet seemed to fill the room. Some time after he had ceased reading, Blanche held out her hand to him.

“ God sent you to us, Mr. Thorpe,” she said, “ I feel sure of that. You have comforted *me*. I know that you will be a stay to Avice. Avice is especially dear to me ; she is all that remains to me of my mother, of my father, of Phillip. It would have been too sad if I had been called upon to die before meeting with you, true, kind friend ! Now I bequeath Avice to you, and I know that you will watch over her till death.”

“ Till death !” said Mr. Thorpe, solemnly.

Blanche died in the afternoon, quietly as if she had fallen into a sweet sleep, and with her head lying on her sister’s arm. Always a child in her innocence, yet a child of much sorrow in the midst of her strange experience of the life in which she had never been an actor, she passed away in her twenty-third year, and Avice was left, indeed, alone. More utterly alone, perhaps, than she would have felt herself to be if Blanche

had died and made no sign. It was an additional bitter grief to her to lose Blanche in the very moment when the latter, yearning for companionship like herself, had had restored to her the powers and faculties that had so long remained dormant. What a joy it would have been to Avice to have been allowed to speak with this dear sister of all the past ; to have been allowed to make atonement to her for past neglect ;—for Avice now found much to reproach herself with on that score. What a joy it would have been to her to labour for this sister ! How would it be possible for her to struggle on in the midst of a life so desolate and loveless as hers had become now ?

A few days after Blanche's burial, Mr. Thorpe sought an interview with Avice. He had come to bid her farewell for a short time. He was compelled to return to Yorkshire ; but in two months he would come back ; and in the meantime he wished her to remain where she was, under the protection of Mrs. Ritson, and to correspond with him. If she had any wish as to her own future, he desired that she would communicate it to him without reserve, relying on his readiness to help her to the utmost of his power. Avice opened her whole heart to

him ; and at this time, in which all her energies were prostrated, she did not do herself justice. Mr. Thorpe was a generous, but also a stern man.

“This is the old story of human weakness, and incapacity, and short-coming,” he said. “You are conscious of much failure in the past ; yet you are prepared to make a failure of the whole future. I expected something nobler of you—I expect it still. We have never done with the duties of life so long as we live ; and it is upon the duties performed, or otherwise, not upon the pleasures lost or won, that we shall have to reflect seriously when both have become to us things of the past. A life filled with complaint is a life wasted ; let us not complain, but act. All who are born into the world are called upon to suffer : we pity those who fall by the way ; we reserve our admiration for such as endure nobly to the end.”

Mr. Thorpe could not fail to strike one right chord in Avice’s two-fold nature. The nature that was peculiarly her own ; that she had received direct from God ; the poetic and artistic nature of which Mr. Thorpe knew nothing ; of which he could know nothing, constituted as he himself was ; rendered her sensitive and excitable

in extremes, and so often left her weak ;—but that other nature which he understood, the nature which she partly inherited from more than one ancient and proud race, and had partly acquired through associations past and present ; whose chief ingredient was pride—not a pride in dead bones, but in ever-living deeds and examples ; which had been readily trained so as to be capable of exhibiting always, and especially on an emergency, the loftiest qualities—high courage, calm endurance, and noble endeavour, was, when roused, at all times strong. Mr. Thorpe appealed to this nature, and he intended to try it hardly ; not dreaming of that other nature, which was also strong, and which was not to be comprehended by him in its weakness or its strength.

What Mr. Thorpe said had the effect of immediately rousing Avice. Years back, mere girl as she still was, and before she had had any experience in suffering, she had entertained a romantic notion that it was a great privilege to be called upon to endure much, because it is only in trial that the nobler qualities of the heart and mind can be brought prominently forth. But it was of the kind of trial in which man or woman may readily glory, that she had

dreamed. Suffering for loyalty's sake ; for conscience' sake ;—suffering that was the alternative betwixt honour and dishonour. It was the cheering on father or husband, brother or lover, in paths leading to victory or death ; it was attending them with a firm, proud step, if with a bursting heart, to the block or the stake ; it was enduring poverty and contumely, under the high consciousness of being called upon to suffer in the way of duty. Of such suffering as had fallen upon her, Avice had never dreamed. Now she had arrived at it she felt that its immediate effect was to drag her down. But this feeling could not long remain predominant. Mr. Thorpe's words ; her own belief that those she loved were always hovering about her, always cognizant of her doings, stimulated her courage ; sustained her flagging interest in life ; supplied her with a motive to further exertion ; rescued her from that most fearful if not impossible state—living in the world without a purpose.

Avice must live on, then, and she would live nobly. The first question was, what could she do in order to make herself independent of others ? She could not encroach further on the bounty of Mr. Thorpe ; she would compel him to honour her, to acknowledge that God had

not endowed her with high energies in vain. Giving all her attention to this subject at once, she felt, to begin with, that it would be impossible for her ever to act as shopwoman again, even if that mode of life could have procured her a living. She had compelled herself to endure much for Blanche's sake, but for her own sake she could not endure this. She possessed no one accomplishment that would have enabled her to act as governess, for Colonel Desborough had rather neglected the education of his youngest daughter, of whose natural abilities he entertained a very high opinion; and Avice had been well content to dream away her days in the old home at Stanley. She did not like to enter a family in any capacity merely menial, because that would involve constant companionship with uneducated persons of perhaps coarse minds and manners; and, whatever may be said about equality, it has been irrevocably decreed that the polished and unpolished, the rude and refined, shall be everlastingly kept apart by instincts as strong on one side as they are on the other. On consulting with Mrs. Simpson she learned that she had sufficient funds left to apprentice herself to a milliner, and that in three years' time she would be fitted to

take such a situation as she had formerly sought in Mrs. Simpson's work-room. It needed all Avice's courage to contemplate a life like this, but she resolved upon adopting it at once; and her first letter to Mr. Thorpe announced her determination.

Mr. Thorpe in his reply applauded the promptness of her decision; acknowledged that under all the circumstances as she had explained them this seemed the most feasible plan; but requested her to delay binding herself to anything until she saw him again. In the meantime she was to read and study attentively the books he had left with her, and to take especial note of such passages as he had marked. She was to read his letters with attention. The books were chiefly selections from Lord Bacon's works, the life and political writings of Milton, and some others of a similar tendency to the latter. Avice honoured her new friend, and wished to please him, and this also was a source of strength to her. For some reason, he evidently wished her mind to become acquainted with and familiarised with his own, and she kept this object in view as she read on.

One thing that immediately struck her was his utter contempt for mere rank. He was, in

every sense of the word, a republican; he insisted on the natural rights of the people, in opposition to the divine right of kings and their counsellors. He would have assisted at the executions of Charles, and Strafford, and Laud. At a later day he would have been a Hampden or a Russell. He abhorred the whole race of Stuarts, and honoured all who had opposed, or in any way helped to exterminate them. He would have the aristocracy shorn of its fictitious power and sway. All this was in opposition to Avice's preconceived notions on these subjects. To honour rank and, above all, kingly authority, the source of loyal and noble deeds and all honour, was inseparable from her poetic temperament; and she had an hereditary love for the Stuarts, with whom the last vestiges of chivalry seemed to have passed from the earth. The history of her own race had given her a taste for studying the history of her country; and all its principal events and the politics of by-gone days were familiar to her. Was Mr. Thorpe aware of this? and was he seeking to uproot from her very nature what he deemed prejudices—seeking to substitute prejudices of his own? Avice thought so, and that she understood his motive. He seemed to consider, that shaking her vene-

ration for, and so decreasing the value of hereditary rank in her estimation, was one best means of lessening her regret at the great change to which she had been compelled to submit. For similar reasons, he brought prominently before her examples of the strong contempt entertained by minds constituted like his own for all luxury and show, as tending to deteriorate rather than to elevate, to make men dependent upon circumstances, until circumstances take all rule out of their enfeebled hands. Disliking, even shuddering at some of his principles, Avice could not help honouring the man. Continuing to read, to sift, digest, compare—studying that other side of many questions which she had never been aware of, having been well content with the one side that had always been presented to her view—Avice frequently found herself compelled to acknowledge that many of her heroes and her monsters of history were, perhaps, neither so admirable nor so detestable as she had hitherto believed them to be. There is something inexpressibly painful, especially to one who has been an enthusiast, in the breaking up of an old love and faith. Avice was conscious of this pain, as she went on; but she did not give up her task, for she had become interested.

Unconsciously her mind was acquiring new strength ; and, if only as a means of compelling occasional cessations of regret, Mr. Thorpe, in providing her with this new and absorbing occupation, had done her great service.

His letters were especially interesting to her ; because, from time to time, they disclosed all the leading incidents in his own life : his early boyhood, with its hopes and aspirations ; his after-struggles and disappointments ; his peculiar position with regard to his sisters ; his present occupation, with the several motives that led him to adopt it. From all this Avice understood how much at fault Mrs. Ritson and others had been when they supposed him to be a rich man. He was rich for one of his principles and habits ; but his income was by no means a large one ; and he obtained it by his daily labour. Avice did not respect him the less when she made this discovery ; and she honoured him more than ever. He was a man to make sacrifices, not to give help in any ordinary way. All his life long he seemed to have been doing what he would not, yet always doing it with a good grace. He could at least act so far from choice. He was not, as he himself said, by any means even one amongst the least of great men. He

could not compel circumstances to bend to his will ; but he had a peculiar firmness of character and steadiness of purpose that always led him to make the best of circumstances as they were. With all this ready yielding about him, there was much that was despotic in his character ; and this trait was apparent to Avice even now. He could forgive those who soared far beyond himself—he could admire them ; but for any who fell below himself he could only feel contempt. He compelled Avice to understand that, if she yielded to any weak regret merely on account of loss of position, she would fall immeasurably in his estimation. He expected from her that she should act nobly in whatever situation she might be placed. This was something sufficiently in Avice's way to command her attention. In addition to being so largely indebted to him—in addition to being in a manner bound to him by almost the last words that Blanche had uttered, and his own solemn response to those words—there was something in his whole history, in his eloquence, rough, but never inelegant, that made her anxious to keep the place in his regard that she had unconsciously won. Gratitude, and respect, and admiration were combining to give to Mr. Thorpe

the kind of influence over Avice that he seemed desirous of possessing.

The two months passed, and, punctual to his promise, Mr. Thorpe again made his appearance. He sought an interview with Avice at once; and these two, who in the interval had become better acquainted with each other than they might have become during a like period of personal communication, met as the friends they were and must be for ever.

"It pleased me to see you come to a decision so readily," he said, in reference to Avice's project for making herself independent. "You honestly expressed your repugnance to the step you were about to take: you gave me all the reasons that seemed to make this step inevitable or the readiest for you to take. It is enough to say that I applaud the spirit in which you prepare yourself to act. You remain in the same mind?"

"Certainly," said Avice.

"That is quite right; but as your friend, I now step in. I must be your friend, or nothing. Your objections did not weigh with me; they were derived from a class, not from humanity at large. Any girl of your own age, brought up with different social views, would enter on

such an occupation without considering it to be a hardship. Therefore it would not be a hardship to you, in fact. There is, however, much that you have overlooked, that renders this way of life objectionable for you. Those who enter upon it are not isolated, alone as you are ; they possess, or ought to possess, parents, friends, a home — protection. In this great metropolis, with its constant hurry and confusion, its eager interests, its vices and snares, you, with your youth and inexperience, your tastes that set you apart from others, your regrets that cannot die, your friendlessness, would be out of place—lost. I have been constituted your guardian, and in this character I object to the plan altogether.”

Avice was surprised ; scarcely prepared to yield. “I must be independent,” she said. “What, then, do you advise me to do ?”

“Does Mrs. Ritson know anything of your plans for the future ?”

“Nothing. I dread telling her that we must be separated. I dread the separation for myself. We have always been as mother and child together.”

“I know it ; God and nature so brought you together, in spite of the distinctions of class. From what Mrs. Ritson herself has said to me, I know

that such a separation would break her heart,—not figuratively, but positively; and, therefore, for her sake, as well as your own, I would keep you together if possible. Putting your first plan aside as not feasible, I will place two others before you, betwixt which you can choose. Both will leave you independent, and neither will involve a separation from your nurse.”

“Dear, kind Mr. Thorpe!” exclaimed Avice, clasping her hands together, “surely God sent you to us, as Blanche said.”

“Listen,” said Mr. Thorpe, whose steady manner and fixed look never changed. “In the first place, you may be apprenticed in the country as readily as in London; and in the country, I fancy, a smaller premium would be required. The town near which I live is pleasantly situated on the sea-coast; and there I could use my influence for you in this way—in fact, I could arrange the matter at once. I should then have you near me; and I should like this, for have I not promised to watch over you till death? Mrs. Ritson, with her small income of thirty pounds a year, might live well in Selby; and she would make a home for you. In this way you might remain together until her death.”

“ Ah, this will do !” exclaimed Avice ; “ say nothing more, Mr. Thorpe ; nothing could be better than this.”

“ Perhaps nothing could be better for you just now,” said Mr. Thorpe, with a slight degree of sadness in his tone. “ Then I will say nothing of that other plan.”

“ The one you have mentioned suits me so exactly,” said Avice. “ I shall be with Mrs. Ritson ; I shall be near you ; I shall get away from this great, overcrowded place, in which I do truly feel lost. In a small, quiet country town I shall live in entire seclusion ; there will be no one to interfere with me—no one will inquire who I am. ‘ This is, above all things, what I desire.’ ”

“ Your notions about a small, quiet, country town are peculiar,” said Mr. Thorpe. “ I must undeceive you, because others will do so if I do not. All small, quiet towns have a reputation for swarming with curious and gossiping people ; and Selby is said by some to be especially distinguished in this way. In London you may readily find the sort of seclusion you seek, the absence of interference, of inquiry as to who you are ; but not at Selby, where every little incident is an event. Before you have been there a week,

the whole population will be occupied with two questions—Have you seen the new apprentice at So-and-So's?—Who is she? You will be certain of creating a sensation for many reasons; you will be questioned on all hands, so will Mrs. Ritson. You will parry these questions as well as you can; and then people will begin to surmise whatever they please; and then rumours will get afloat. By-and-by, these will reach your ear; they will be sure to astonish—they may offend you. All this will be inevitable; you must be prepared for it."

"These are sad drawbacks, yet anything may be borne rather than a separation from Nurse Ritson," said Avice, musing. "What is that other plan of which you spoke?"

"I should not like to see you give up this present plan merely on account of the drawbacks I have mentioned," said Mr. Thorpe. "Thousands endure these small annoyances every day. Every situation in life has its drawbacks; and I have only incidentally mentioned one in connection with the kind of life I propose to you. It will have its other drawbacks. Mrs. Ritson may die—I do not think that she will live long—and then you will lose the kind of

home that is a necessity to you—a home in which your heart can find rest.”

“I see that you are afraid of making life appear too pleasant to me, Mr. Thorpe,” said Avice, smiling sadly.

“On the contrary, I would willingly make life as pleasant to you as possible, but in so serious a matter I could not flatter you, if flattery was not foreign to my nature. You have probably a long life before you, and it is essential to your future happiness (is that an inadmissible term to you?—you shrink from it!)—it is essential to your future well-being, then, that you should perfectly understand what you are about whilst entering into engagements that must influence all the life lying before you. I must be perfectly honest and open with you, as I believe you to be with me. I will now, at your own request, unfold to you that other plan, at which I have so far only hinted. In some respects—at a first glance, which is always to be distrusted—it will suit you better than the other. In a wild, rugged, little-frequented district in the north of England, stands a solitary house, so situated that none ever pass unless they are bound to it. Of this house you may

immediately become the sole mistress. To it you may welcome with open arms your old nurse and friend—if penniless so much the better, as your own means will be ample to supply her few wants; to help others who may need your help. You will be able to devote yourself to the task of making her few remaining years happy, for you will have little else to do. Forgetting your former rank—which you must do altogether—you will not be without position. Surrounded by a rude population that will learn to look up to you, you will be respected;—you will be afforded opportunities of making yourself beloved. No prying eyes will be allowed to look upon you there; no busy tongues will annoy you. You will always be conscious of a protection that will place you above fear of the world. What say you to becoming the mistress of this house?”

It did not at all occur to Avice that he was describing his own home: she knew that he resided with his sisters in the farm on the Moor side. But this happy home for *her*; this home that so suited her *now*;—to which her heart yearned as he spoke of it;—on what terms was it to be obtained?

“I almost dread asking what are the drawbacks in this case,” said Avice. “Formidable they must be if in proportion to the fairness of the promise.”

“You will find them formidable, without doubt ; for having given you the bright side of the picture, I feel bound to reveal to you all that lies hidden on what we will call the dark side. In the first place, this house that wants a mistress has a master already. You see before you the master of this solitary dwelling amid the Burnham crags.”

Avice, surprised,—shocked perhaps—started up, and for a few seconds looked Mr. Thorpe full in the face. All that he had said was true. Then, pained at having exhibited to him emotions that she thought must pain him, she sat down again, and resting her arms on the table before her, covered her face with her hands.

“This is the great difficulty to begin with,” continued Mr. Thorpe. “In accepting this home, this protection, you must become my wife. I have tried to make you acquainted with my character altogether ;—you see what I am externally — a man old enough to be your father. I believe I have so far gained your respect that in anything short of this proposal

you would not fear to place your destiny in my hands."

"That is true," said Avice, raising her head. "This proposal is so sudden to me—it was so unexpected—I am scarcely prepared to reply."

"You are not at all prepared," said Mr. Thorpe, "for there will be much to consider. In the first place this solitude, so desirable to you now, may not be endurable to you always. I have arrived at an age at which men rarely change for the better—what I am I shall be to the end. I have told you what my sisters are; they will scarcely be society for you;—I can only promise that they shall not annoy you. If I die you will be left barely provided with the necessities of life, and nothing more. Long habits of seclusion have unfitted me for much social intercourse with men, and I cannot give up these habits; therefore year after year will pass and bring no change to the solitude which you would have to share with me. As my wife you will no longer be an aristocrat—you will belong to me, to my race. I shall require you to be for ever silent on the subject of your birth and connections; such reminiscences would be out of place in your new sphere. You must never forget, that if you had retained your

original place in society—if I had found you wealthy and surrounded by distinguished friends—I would not have married you if I could. I must lift you altogether out of the past, so that nothing save its regrets of the heart shall linger with you. I, on my part, have strong confidence in you, or I should not have made this proposal. If you decide to accept it, nothing will ever shake my faith in your honour, your purity of heart. Some shades of sadness will always rest upon you ; but with dignity you will keep your place at my side, I know. I cannot in any other way than this give you the full protection I wish to give. It is only in the character of husband that I can rescue you from the life of trial, of possible hard battling with the world and its difficulties, for which you are every way unfitted. Consider all this well—take time ; and whatever your decision may be, rely upon my friendship always.”

It was not to be supposed that this man of expedients, who was willing to marry Avice as a best means of serving, protecting her as he wished, would suffer at all as far as the heart was concerned if his offer was declined. A consciousness of this spared Avice much embarrassment ; but she was embarrassed nevertheless.

She honoured him more than ever ; she would not have wounded his feelings for the world ; but even for his own sake it was necessary that she should speak out. Mr. Thorpe was about to take his leave, but she stopped him.

“I had better say at once what I have to say on this subject, Mr. Thorpe. I feel all your kindness ; I thank you from my heart ; but I cannot become your wife. The woman you so honour should possess for you the kind of affection I do not feel and cannot feel. Even if I did so regard you, I could not consent to your sacrificing yourself in this way solely for my benefit. Let me not lose my friend, and gain nothing in exchange. Here let this subject drop. I wish to go to Selby, and I know that I can rely upon you for performing all that you have promised.”

Mr. Thorpe had remained standing whilst she spoke ; now he resumed his seat. “Avice,” he said, and it was the first time he had addressed her in this familiar way, “I know that I have been an uncouth kind of wooer ; I was sure to be that, whenever my time came. I will now say to you at last what others in such a case would have said first. You see at what age I have arrived ; and up to four months ago

I had never seen the woman that I would have made my wife. I admired you before we met; I have loved you ever since I first saw you. I am not sacrificing anything in making you this offer; I am following the dictates of my heart as well as of my reason. I will not allow myself to be selfish if I know it; but perhaps you will allow me to speak all the truth. Such a man as I am can love only once in life, and that strongly. It is so I love you. If you persist in refusing me, a light will have passed for ever from my path that had it lingered would have brightened all life for me. Thenceforward I shall feel myself indeed a solitary man. You say that you cannot love me; you respect me, you trust me altogether: and there can be no better guarantee for the happiness of married life than perfect mutual esteem to begin with. I have no high opinion of the ordinary love, so called, that brings most individuals together. I have witnessed its failures and I distrust it. I know that your heart is free; I know that it will be a rich prize to him who gains it. My great love, my entire devotion, might win it in time. I know that it is unseemly to urge this matter under all the circumstances; but the case is urgent, and I wish to spare you all that I know

you will be called upon to endure if you are left to battle with the world alone. If this must be, the knowledge of what you are suffering will be a constant source of anguish to me. If you give me now the power of protecting you effectually, you shall be to me as a daughter until your regrets have become softened by time, until your heart can turn to me. You know all now; you know also, still, that under any circumstances you may always rely upon me."

He left the room as he spoke, and Avice had now no power to stop him. Edward Thorpe, like many wiser men before him, had allowed himself to be mastered by love to a degree that he would have condemned in others. There was no mistake about *his* love; it was ardent, it was incapable of change. Avice was distressed—paralysed. She could not doubt that this true friend, who had so many claims upon her, was dependent upon her for the happiness of his whole life as he had said. He was not a man to be doubted in any one matter; and Avice fully understood how strong the love must be that could force him to speak as he had done; to become on a sudden so unlike all that she had conceived him to be. In this new character he could not fail to interest her; she could

not put the thought of him away from her ; but it was a distress all through. Free in heart as she was, she was conscious that he could never be her choice. Besides, speculations like these were new to her ; she was in heart simple as a child ; there was to her something even appalling in the idea of marriage as it was presented to her now. What should she do ? Break her friend's heart or perhaps break her own ? In this state of mind she remained for several days, during which Mr. Thorpe did not make his appearance. Avice's character was not an ordinary one in any respect. Never since she had begun to think had she contemplated for herself a life free from trial. She had always gloried in believing that when called upon she would be found to bear trial well. There is no true trial where there is no self-sacrifice : and Avice had never yet voluntarily borne a great trouble with the purpose of benefiting others. So she herself thought at this time ; forgetting what she had borne, and had been prepared to bear for Blanche. This earnestly busy state of mind, enabling her to keep her heart out of sight, was working well for Edward Thorpe's purpose. For his sake she was striving to become a heroine. For his sake—republican as

he was ; unsympathising as he was in much that was sacred to her ; repugnant to her as he was in the character he wished to assume ! Her mind was sufficiently liberal to give him his due, to admire in him what was worthy admiration ; for she was no slave to prejudices small or great ; but with true womanly tact and feeling she went straight to the root of the matter, and judged him as he was of himself, noble or otherwise. Viewed in this way Edward Thorpe stood out nobly. Neither was her heart altogether silent, for it was overflowing with gratitude to him as her benefactor. Avice got so far as this bravely ; and faltered again. Then came in the smaller considerations ; the dread of encountering the world ; of looking steadily on the great cheerless waste lying before her ; the folly of turning away from the haven of rest offered to her. Then she dashed these considerations aside as irrelevant to the whole matter. Once, only once, it occurred to her to write to Lady Otley to explain to her how she was situated, to implore her advice and help. This could only be for a moment ; for no one could understand better the uselessness of an appeal to Lady Otley. But it was not alone the consciousness of the folly of this thought that

induced her to give it up in the moment it was formed. She was also conscious of having been about to stoop to an unworthy subterfuge. If she finally determined to marry Mr. Thorpe she must meet him nobly or not at all—not after trying her best to escape him, and failing, and turning to him as a last resource.

Avice was shocked to find that she had been about to place herself in this situation, and the shock left her more steady and decided. If she gave her hand to this worthy man, she must feel that she was worthy of him in the one respect of appreciating and honouring him too much to accept him in any underhand way. So, instead of writing to Lady Otley, Avice consulted Mrs. Ritson; and that worthy soul, whose intellect was greatly shattered, but whose heart remained in the old place—who still did and would believe Mr. Thorpe to be a very wealthy man—who was enchanted at the prospect of living in some remote place with her child—could only wonder that Avice demurred at all to this plan for making every body happy. It was very clear to Avice, that it was in her power to make two persons happy, to both of whom she was largely indebted; and quite as clear that, in any case, there was no happiness

for herself. Then why should she demur at all? Was it really natural to her to be selfish—ungrateful? She could not admit this: she would only consider these two, who had so largely considered herself: she would deal by them as they had dealt by her. She got so far as this again—and again she faltered. At last it was the impulse of a moment that decided Avice's fate. When Mr. Thorpe again made his appearance, Avice at once gave him her hand frankly, saying,

“You know how far I am unworthy of you—it may be in your power to make me more worthy.”

The strong man was strongly moved. For a few minutes he could not speak. At length he said:

“I expected this of you—or nothing. I am satisfied.”

Shortly after this, a quiet wedding took place in the quiet church at St. John's Wood, in the graveyard of which Blanche lay buried. On the same day Mr. Thorpe departed alone for Yorkshire, whence he returned after a month's absence, ready to bear away with him his wife and Mrs. Ritson. In the interim, Avice had written a long letter to her surviving sister, explaining

everything ; and this letter she enclosed in another, addressed to Lady Otley, in which she merely requested that it might be forwarded. She could not readily give up all ties of kindred. If not now, at some future day she hoped to hear from Clementina.

The Simpsons parted from their aged relative with much satisfaction on the whole. Mr. Thorpe, who had been made acquainted with the entire history of the six hundred pounds, gave it up to them altogether, he himself intending to provide for Mrs. Ritson in the future. The interest thus yielded up was so much more capital to throw into the business. Mr. Musgrove was the only individual openly dissatisfied.

“It’s a complete sell,” he said, “and I never was so taken in in my life. I gave the fellow credit for being quite disinterested, and he was in love all the time ! Mr. Thorpe has turned out to be the greatest of humbugs, and I’ll never believe in human goodness again.”

CHAPTER XII.

FOUR months after his visit to Staunton Court, which we have recorded, Walter Osborne again made his appearance, in order to attend his father's funeral and hear the reading of the will, according to which he was left in possession of everything, after the bequests to Mr. Rycroft, on condition of his taking entire charge of Miss Osborne; a small annuity to Lady Cope, who had been impoverished by a spendthrift husband; and some few legacies of small amount. The heir came and departed in silence, holding no communication with anyone. If Mr. Rycroft possessed any knowledge of his movements, no one was the wiser for that knowledge; and, as the confidential friend, if not adviser of the family, he gained some credit by his silence. Few had expected that Walter Osborne would choose to take up his abode at the family mansion; but, on the other hand, nobody had been

prepared to witness such a sudden access of importance to Mr. Rycroft. His first act, after Mr. Osborne's death, was to dismiss all the servants of the establishment and replace them by others from a distance. Some of those discarded domestics told odd stories, one of which was, that late on a very dark, wet night, shortly before Mr. Osborne's death, Mr. Rycroft, who had been absent some days, made his appearance in a post chaise, accompanied by a female, closely muffled up, who was immediately taken to the private apartments occupied by Lady Cope and Miss Osborne, where she remained more than a week, never mixing with the servants, and seen by only two of them, who described her as being a coarse, low-looking woman, of middle age. Mr. Rycroft's account of her was, that she came on trial, as attendant to the insane Miss Osborne, but that he feared she would not suit. More than once screams, always stifled, were heard to issue from Miss Osborne's apartment, which none of the servants were ever allowed to enter, she being always removed from one apartment to another by Lady Cope, whenever their services were required. The servants naturally got into a habit of listening; and on one occasion Miss Osborne was distinctly heard to ex-

claim, "No one was ever kind to me but him—and you have taken him from me! Let me die!" On a particular night, during the stay of this woman, the stifled screams were again heard; and two of the female servants listened and watched. Long after midnight, while it was still dark (it was in the month of January), two figures were seen to emerge from those mysterious private apartments; and the two watchers immediately recognised Mr. Rycroft, who for some days past had been nearly all along closeted with Lady Cope, and the strange woman. Both tracked them through the house, and out into the darkness, where they became lost. Both averred that the woman carried something under her cloak—that they had heard the cries of a new-born infant. On the following day, Mr. Rycroft had his conference with Lady Cope as usual; but the strange woman was gone. Mr. Rycroft himself admitted that she had taken her departure suddenly, not having suited Lady Cope, as he expected she would not. It was the surmise of all who gave credit to this story, that the woman and child had been smuggled away by some vessel, lying in readiness on the coast. But all did not pretend to give credit to the story. Some allowance was made

for the excited imaginations of the servants; and, even allowing it to be true, no discredit could be thrown on Mr. Rycroft, who was, doubtless, acting under orders, doing his best to save from further disgrace an already dishonoured family. Indeed, for many reasons, John Rycroft came off with flying colours. In Selby and the neighbourhood, as would have been the case elsewhere, the majority were inclined to think as well as possible of a man so evidently rising in the world that there was no telling at what greatness he might arrive. Very shortly after Mr. Osborne's death, Lady Cope died; and then Mr. Rycroft revolutionised Staunton Court altogether.

He at once provided Miss Osborne with a suitable attendant—a grim, unhappy-looking elderly woman, who seemed to have been accustomed to look on the dark side of human life, and to believe in it, if she did not like it rather than otherwise. After performing this act of duty, we might suppose that he had earned the right of indulging himself. The interior of the old family mansion of the Osbornes, as it appeared at this time, would not have suited a less refined taste than Mr. Rycroft's. The father of Mr. Osborne had been a penurious man, who

had grudged every penny expended in keeping the mansion itself in necessary repair ; so that adding anything by way of interior decoration had been quite out of his line. His son and successor, the spendthrift and libertine, was a coarse man, who despised all the elegancies of life himself, and who had never allowed his unhappy wife the privilege of gratifying her own tastes. The furniture that had been in use for more than a century sufficed for such riotous company as Mr. Osborne had always kept ; but at his death it was found to be in a sadly dilapidated condition. Every article by way of ornament, capable of ready demolition, had disappeared long ago. The tables, chairs, and couches had for the most part been broken at various times and roughly put together again ; the carpets were stained and rotted ; and such rooms as were papered retained traces of the glasses and decanters, not always empty, that had been hurled at them by men made mad with strong drink. Mr. Rycroft speedily put out of sight the outward signs of all this pollution. The old furniture was hid away in lumber rooms or disposed of ; painters and paper-hangers were busy during several weeks, making everything look bright and fresh in com-

parison, if everything thus renovated was not in the best taste. When these preliminary matters came to a close, new furniture began to pour in and as Mr. Rycroft had only an eye for show, the whole interior occupied by him looked, when finished, as gaudy and vulgar as possible. The chief person concerned was, however, well satisfied; and so was one other individual, whose taste in the selection of the furniture had been consulted, and who was supposed by many to be very chiefly concerned too. This was the dashing widow of an attorney at Selby, who, by means of her large, stout person, her loud voice, her extravagance in dress, and determined pretensions of many kinds to gentility, had succeeded in establishing herself as a person of the first consequence in the society of the place. There was nothing surprising in the fact of Mr. Rycroft being greatly attracted by such a lady, or in her admiring him in return. They were so evidently made for one another, that every one saw and acknowledged the fitness of their union, when at length that event took place. And a very dashing mistress of Staunton Court Mrs Rycroft speedily became, carrying everything before her with a higher hand than ever. Some few amongst the elderly and very old.

people did think occasionally of the poor, insane young lady, who might bear no part in the gay doings now going on in her father's house ; but for the most part the favoured visitors at Staunton Court (Mrs. Rycroft being very scrupulously select) were well content to pay court to the present master and mistress, who, in a patronizing sort of way, were ready to make themselves as agreeable as possible. Nevertheless, there were many who would talk, especially those who were, and thought they ought not to have been, included in Mrs. Rycroft's list of persons not visitable ; and these frequently wondered where John Rycroft found the means to support his wife's extravagance, when they heard of some new grand entertainment, or when they saw her dashing along the road or through the town in her handsome carriage, drawn by two splendid grey horses. All this was nobody's business, however ; and there was no mistake about Mr. and Mrs. Rycroft having become established as the greatest personages of the town and neighbourhood.

Amongst those of whose very existence Mrs. Rycroft did not condescend to be aware, there were several who had the bad taste to proclaim aloud and parade on every available occasion the

utter scorn and contempt with which they individually viewed the whole proceedings of that upstart lady. It was a remarkable circumstance that such individuals were always the best informed as to these proceedings; so that others who cared little about the matter, or who lived at a distance, were sure to learn from them if from no one else, the latest doings of the ex-shop-girl, down to the exhibition of her last new bonnet in the parish church. Perhaps the most conspicuous amongst persons of this class were the four Misses Winstay, a family of old maids, the daughters of a deceased surgeon, who lived on the small property he had left them, and in the old house in the high street of Selby, which he had occupied for half a century. *They* remembered the time when Mrs. Rycroft, standing behind the counter of the mercer's shop opposite, was fain enough to pay court to them as the most distinguished amongst her master's customers. *They*, too, remembered the time when John Rycroft, always vulgar, was a very humble man, considering it a high honour to be stopped and spoken with by their father, who had always taken great interest in mining affairs. *Then* John Rycroft always lifted his hat, which their father never thought of doing to such a man

(no great honour to their father that ; but they did not see it). These Misses Winstay stood out so strongly in opposition to the encroaching greatness of the Rycrofts, that some persons—such is human nature—began to take delight in ministering to their dissatisfaction. It might be a mere fiction, or it might be fact, but whether true or not, it was reported to the Misses Winstay by a *particular* friend, that on a recent occasion of their having been spoken of in the presence of Mrs. Rycroft, she had coolly asked who and what they were. This was more than flesh and blood could stand. Who *they* were ! After expending amongst themselves more breath than the subject was worth, the Misses Winstay found it impossible to exist much longer under this new infliction on their dignity in the absence of sympathy ; and such sympathy as they needed was only to be obtained from their oldest, staunchest friends, the Misses Thorpe of Moorlands. So on the following morning, though it was in the month of February, and the snow lay thick upon the ground, and the roads were sure to be heavy, the ancestral gig, to which was attached a very questionable-looking mare (a sad falling off from Mrs. Rycroft's handsome carriage and greys) was ordered out to convey the two

younger ladies, Miss Rebecca and Miss Emma Winstay, to Moorlands, where they intended to pass the night. In the meantime, the two elder Misses Winstay were expected to contain themselves as well as they could. The Misses Winstay and the Misses Thorpe, of Moorlands, had, in their youth, been schoolfellows. They belonged to a class of old maids that is now fast dying out. Narrow-minded because educated in the narrowest of ways; self-opinionated because their own small sphere had bounded their means of observation; proud because they had never been afforded opportunities of measuring their littleness with what was truly great; incapable of appreciating true greatness, because their capacities, whatever these might be, had never been ministered to; having a greater opinion than it deserves of the small consequence that money gives, because it is the kind of consequence most readily made apparent; frugal and prudent by way of redeeming all this, but frugal and prudent only for selfish ends; weak, but accounted strong, because opportunities for falling had never come in their way; shrewd, thrifty, and managing as the ablest of the men with whom they came in contact; vain, empty, censorious, and talkative as any of their own sex

need be in order to deserve all that has been said of them. Being all this, the Misses Wynstay and Thorpe additionally prided themselves on the friendship between them—that was inevitable under the circumstances; and lasting because it had never been put to any severe test.

The house occupied by the Thorpes, and known by the name of Moorlands, was an ancient structure, and had evidently been of importance in its day. It was some proof of the respectability of the Thorpe family that the house and some adjoining lands had been in their occupation for more than two centuries. The homestead stood on the extreme verge of an extensive and dreary moor that stretched away on one side to the rugged and mountainous district known by the general name of the Burnham Crag, but the front of the house overlooked a richly fertile country, stretching far as the eye could reach. At the distance of a mile and a half stood the most rural of villages, embosomed amid trees of ancient growth; and here dwelt the few neighbours—including the vicar, a venerable man who was a widower and childless—with whom the Misses Thorpe condescended to associate; for, like Mrs. Rycroft, they had a high opinion of their own dignity.

A consciousness of this dignity, a high sense of the importance of maintaining the family consequence, animated all the three sisters alike; and this bond of union enabled them to live together in something like harmony, notwithstanding the dissimilarity of character existing among them. The eldest, Miss Lydia, was the clever person of the family. She understood nothing of business; her mind was of too high an order to attend to the common details of every-day life. Miss Lydia had voluntarily devoted herself to the pursuit of every kind of knowledge; and having within herself the consciousness of superiority that gives confidence, she was enabled to maintain amongst her acquaintances the character for exceeding cleverness that had always appertained to her. Miss Lydia was really clever in botany; she had taken to it in her youth; and now, when upwards of fifty, her knowledge of this particular kind was worth something. She was always the spokeswoman on particular occasions; but the few visitors at Moorlands were in the habit of protesting that they would rather talk all day long with Miss Martha or Miss Susan than endure the infliction of half an hour's conversation with this very learned lady. Miss Martha was the housekeeper

and chief business woman ; and Miss Susan, the youngest, did the greater part of the visiting and gossiping. The two latter were short and stout, and florid in complexion ; Miss Lydia was tall, and remarkably lean and sallow, as the result, perhaps, of her studious habits. On the day when the two Misses Winstay burst upon them unexpectedly, these three ladies were seated together in one of the old-fashioned parlours ; a large, low room, having two heavy beams running across the ceiling, and the furniture of which was such as might have been found in any better-class farm-house fifty years before. The wind had risen considerably, and snow had fallen heavily during the journey, so that the Misses Winstay arrived in a very dishevelled state. “For goodness gracious what made you come out on such a day as this?” was Miss Susan’s first exclamation on seeing the visitors.

“Oh, you’ll not be surprised when you hear all,” said Miss Rebecca Winstay, nodding her head. “It’s about that Mrs. Rycroft again—such assurance ! But let us go up-stairs, and take our wet things off, and then you shall hear all about it.”

When the ladies had all assembled in the parlour, the last piece of assurance on the part of

Mrs. Rycroft kept them in full talk upwards of two hours. It was a sore subject altogether with the Misses Thorpe, who though they had readily allowed their brother to resign his inheritance to them, had never been able to reconcile themselves to the thought of his being placed in a subordinate situation ; and it had been especially distasteful to them since the unexpected elevation of Mr. Rycroft. Whilst holding that same situation had not Mr. Rycroft himself considered it a great honour to receive an invitation to Moorlands, and had not they always looked upon him as an inferior ? As to the vulgar woman his wife, was not her low origin well known to them ? It was a great mortification to feel that these two persons, in consequence of their extraordinary and sudden rise in the world, would, in the eyes of strangers at least, be perfectly justified in holding their heads above themselves and the Winstays.

“ Every body knows,” said Miss Rebecca Winstay ; “ how Mr. Rycroft came by his money and his consequence. That bad man, Mr. Osborne, had plenty of dirty work on his hands, and he could find nobody else so ready to help him with it. It is a perfect disgrace to the town and neighbourhood that all the best families

should flock to him as they have done. I only wish they had dared to send *us* an invitation ; our refusal would have humbled them a little and done them good, besides shaming the others. Oh, I only wish they had !”

“ I believe,” said Miss Thorpe ; “ the Trevors had an invitation and declined it ; they never liked Mr. Rycroft or his wife.”

“ The Trevors are such quiet people ; they never visit much anywhere, so their refusing says little,” said Miss Emma Winstay. “ But it *was* a shame their never inviting your brother to any of their gay parties.”

The three Misses Thorpe reddened, and fired up altogether.

“ Good gracious, Emma ! you speak as if you thought Edward would have liked an invitation !” exclaimed Miss Susan.

“ The idea ! Edward that never goes anywhere !” said Miss Martha.

“ They *did* know better than to put such an insult on Edward Thorpe,” said Miss Lydia with dignity. “ Even *they* understood that he is too superior a person for them to meddle with.”

Miss Emma Winstay began to cry. “ I’m sure I didn’t for a minute think Edward would have liked such an invitation,” she said ; “ I

know he wouldn't. If anybody knows how superior he is to every one about him I should think I do."

There was a little scene ; for Miss Emma had begun to cry and could not stop herself. It was well known to the Misses Thorpe that Emma Winstay was at any time ready to become Mrs. Thorpe ; but they had never given the slightest encouragement to her foolish attachment, as they looked far higher than the Winstays when thinking of a wife for their brother. They had, however, no objection to his being admired by Emma Winstay, or anybody else ; and before that unfortunate young lady had sobbed herself quite out of breath, they did their best to sooth her.

"What a piece of work about nothing this is, to be sure !" exclaimed Miss Rebecca, who like her friends Miss Thorpe and Miss Martha, was strong-minded. "Talking of Edward, what does he mean to do with the house we understand he has taken ; that lone house standing in the wildest part of the Burnham Range, and that has been uninhabited so long ? Does he mean to live there and bury himself alive ? I, for one, shouldn't be surprised—he has always been odd."

This was another sore subject with the Misses

Thorpe. It was true that their brother had taken the house alluded to, and he had not told them what his intentions respecting it were. They did not like to confess their ignorance, and they could not make any positive assertion as to what their brother intended to do.

“Edward has taken the house altogether—he has purchased it,” said Miss Thorpe. “We never trouble him for information on any subject connected with himself, but wait till he chooses to give it. He never interferes with our plans. This mutual independence of action is understood amongst us. My opinion is that he intends letting it to some one of the miners; it would be a convenience to himself to have it inhabited.”

“That is it, I dare say,” said Miss Rebecca; “but people will talk, you know; and positively there are many at Selby who assert that he is about to be married and to reside there with his wife. Of course *we* didn’t believe this. Such a small house—two little parlours and a kitchen, and three chambers, and no garden of course. Then such a dismal look-out; nothing but the bare rocks to be seen, with sometimes a glimpse of one of those rough men, the miners! We said at once that Edward Thorpe would never

think of taking a wife to such a place as that."

The indignation of the Misses Thorpe on hearing this was without bounds. All spoke out and spoke together, for when their pride was touched there was only one opinion amongst them. Edward Thorpe had too much respect for himself and his family to think of lowering either by settling with a wife in such a place. He was too prudent to marry a wife without fortune; too proud to connect himself with any one whose family was not at least as good as his own; but it was the private opinion of the Misses Thorpe that in the latter respect he would look very high. For these and sundry other reasons, it was quite impossible that he could think of installing himself with a wife in the shabby little dwelling that lay hidden amongst the Burnham Craggs. He had too much regard and respect for his sisters, even to think of marrying without consulting them; of this they were quite confident. Those who invented these falsehoods, of course, wished to see the Thorpe family brought as low as possible; and of course they were destined to be very much disappointed.

"That's just what I said to some of them," continued Miss Rebecca, who had a sort of pas-

sion for communicating to her best friends the worst that was said of them behind their backs. “ ‘Dear me,’ one lady said ; ‘ I never understood that the Thorpes were such great people before ; they’re only farmers, and that’s what they’ve always been.’ I won’t mention names ; but another lady said, ‘ she’d bet anything that Mr. Thorpe would bring a wife with him when he returned from London, for he’d never been able to suit himself here.’ I do wish Edward would end his business and come back for good, and then people might hold their tongues.”

“ We expect that Edward will return to-day,” said Miss Thorpe. “ As to what people say, we are perfectly indifferent about it ; it is too contemptible to be worth a thought.”

“ Dear me, will Mr. Thorpe be back to-day ?” exclaimed Miss Emma, instinctively raising her hands, and adjusting her curls. “ And only to think of our being here, and come to stop all night ! Well, I declare I wouldn’t have come for the world if I’d known. Positively he’ll think we came on purpose to see him !”

You ought to know very well that he wouldn’t think anything at all about the matter if he found you here,” said Miss Martha, bluntly.

But he *won’t* find you here. He writes to say

that he wants to speak with us on some matters of business when he arrives, and that he expects to find us alone. Business is business, you know, and must be attended to. We'll have an early tea, and you can go on to the Slaters, or the Reades, and return here in the morning. I dare say we shall be able to tell you what it's all about."

Miss Martha was accustomed to treat her old friends in this free and easy style, and she could do it without giving offence. So it was arranged that the two ladies should pass the night with some friends in the neighbouring village, whither they proceeded at a later hour of the day, both eagerly anticipating, and one dreading, the news that they might possibly learn the following morning.

Left to themselves, the Misses Thorpe began to speculate anew as to what the important business might be at which their brother had only hinted in his letter—what Miss Rebecca Winslay had said dwelt with them, notwithstanding their ready scorn and paraded indifference. Not one amongst them, especially of late years, had felt quite sure that they understood their brother. The learned Miss Lydia, who allowed, even to herself, that there was something superior about

him ; the hard-business woman, Miss Martha, who admitted that he was tractable ; the rather soft Miss Susan, who said that he was the kindest of creatures, were one and all equally at fault respecting something about him that was not to be comprehended by them, and that, like everything that is incomprehensible, took the shape of a dread and a mystery. To begin with, they had all considered him easy to manage ; but the going on was another matter ; and the thought would occur that he was rather managing *them* ; giving way to them for substantial reasons of his own, but keeping a certain sort of mastery over them, nevertheless. His decisive way of doing things had pleased them so long as the decisions were all in their own favour ; but his prompt way of acting might not always suit them ; and when it did not, there might be no standing against him. They could not help admitting to themselves, that as compared with other men he had always been odd. They knew that he cared nothing about appearances : that if not quite apathetic respecting matters that were life or death to themselves, he must hold them in such utter contempt as to be capable any moment of trampling them down in his pursuit of any object that appeared to him worthy

of engaging his attention. Knowing their brother from his childhood, they knew no more of him than this: the whole mind of the man remained a blank to them. Therefore, whilst answering for him to others, they were always conscious of a certain faltering within themselves that was a tacit acknowledgement of their ignorance and of his power over them. On this occasion their doubts and fears were more than usually on the alert; one great proof of which, was, that they awaited his coming in unbroken silence.

He was expected to arrive at Selby by the six o'clock coach from London, and the gig had been duly forwarded to convey him to Moorlands. Before the clock had struck seven, he arrived at Moorlands. At first sight the sisters were severally impressed with a conviction that some great change had come over him. He had brightened up wonderfully. Hitherto slow in his movements, cold in manner, silent, self-contained, and unapproachable to a certain extent; he was now brisk, cheerful, frank; he spoke freely and cordially; there was an unwonted light in his eyes, and at hard mask, his countenance, showed signs of an inner life, and broke into pleasant and intelligible lines. He had evidently found some

new interest in life ; but he remained the same strong, resolute man whom they never understood, and whom they were to understand at length, to the extent that their own natures would permit.

It was a remarkable circumstance, that on this first occasion of Edward Thorpe's proving to be conversible and perfectly agreeable, his sisters shrank from his advances. Never had Miss Thorpe appeared so stiff and dignified, or Miss Martha so hard and uninterested, or Miss Susan so incapable, as on this present occasion. Edward Thorpe noticed all this, and smiled grimly to himself while striving to give his sisters some general idea of the sights he had seen in London, during tea. When that meal was over, he showed some signs of impatience ; and when the servant had cleared the table, and replenished the fire, and cleaned up the hearth, he drew the bolt of the parlour-door after her, and placing two chairs on each side of the fireplace, he seated himself, desiring his sisters to follow his example.

“ I think,” he said, breaking a pause that had lasted some minutes, during which the three ladies had been gazing steadily in the fire ; “ I think I shall be thirty-six years old if I live till June.”

Miss Thorpe corroborated this fact.

“I am the youngest amongst you,” he continued, “and you all set me an example of celibacy which I was well inclined to follow. I never formed any resolution on the subject ; but up to the time I went to London some months ago, I had a general impression that I was fated to die a bachelor. Whilst in London I was made aware that such a destiny would be against my inclination. I told you in my letter that I had some important information to convey to you :—I am married.”

Miss Thorpe sat more bolt upright in her chair, and stretched her scraggy neck to its full length : Miss Martha folded her plump arms across her ample chest with an air of defiance : and Miss Susan gave utterance to a small, shrill scream.

“I think it would have been more to your honour and ours if you had first consulted us,” said Miss Thorpe. “I hope you don’t mean to insult us further by bringing amongst us a person of no family.”

“The young lady who has so far honoured me,” continued Edward Thorpe, “has no family pretensions whatever. She belongs to an extinct race, and it is her determination, as well as mine

to admit of no questioning on the subject of her origin. Her want of family pleases me, the next person to herself who can be greatly concerned in the matter."

"She has money then, I suppose," said Miss Martha; "you'd surely never be so mad as to marry without money."

"She has no money," said Edward Thorpe, in a provokingly quiet, satisfied tone. "She and a very old friend of hers, whom I love for her sake, will come to me penniless. This want of money also pleases me;—in fact, I have pleased myself altogether."

Miss Thorpe's sallow face became almost white with suppressed passion: Miss Martha's broad cheeks assumed a more fiery redness: and Miss Susan, fairly overcome, took out her pocket handkerchief and sobbed aloud.

"I hope you haven't made an entire fool of yourself by marrying a chit of a girl," said Miss Martha.

"My wife has just entered upon her eighteenth year," said Edward Thorpe.

"Good Lord! And I suppose you took that house on purpose to bring your penniless wife to it?" said Miss Martha, fiercely.

"I did," was the quiet reply.

At this point there burst forth a great storm. Everything that every lady present had to say on the subject was poured forth with an overwhelming volubility. All the scandal, as they had considered it, that had been conveyed to them by the Misses Winstay, and that they had indignantly refuted, all the dishonour and disgrace to themselves, and triumph over them that must be the consequence of these reports proving exactly true, were enlarged upon. Edward Thorpe was reproached for his want of affection; his want of proper pride; his utter want of prudence and common sense. He had ruined himself and must abide the consequences; he should not drag them down with him. They would not visit his wife. They would not allow her to set her foot in Moorlands. *He* might forget them, but *they* would never forget what was due to themselves.

A very wearying, if not painful display of tears and gesticulation accompanied this general protest on the part of the Misses Thorpe. As their brother reclined in his chair quietly, his arms folded, his legs crossed, apparently neither looking on nor listening, he might have been likened to some rock against which the storm was beating in vain. He did not move a muscle, or display the slightest sign of consciousness,

until the speakers had so far exhausted themselves, that during several minutes a dead silence reigned in the room. In the midst of this silence he rose up and spoke.

“I have to remind you, in the first place, of one unpalatable truth,” he said. “*I* am the Master of Moorlands—of this house which you say my wife shall not enter. She enters it or not, at my pleasure. I leave you to digest this truth at your leisure. *I* am the head of the family, of which you profess to be proud; and what I consider to be honourable and right—I that have never stooped to what is dishonourable or wrong—should be right and honourable to you. If you are not capable of comprehending this, as I fear you are not, you must at least be subordinate to my will. You speak to me of small people, who are of sufficient importance to disturb yourselves, as if you imagined they could also disturb me, and mine. You are labouring under a mistake. If I had been at all capable of entering into your small views, you would have discovered the tendency long ago; but you never did discover it, and you ought to give me credit for something better. I soared above your Miss Winstays, and all the rest of your little people: I discovered a noble

creature, and made her my own, and she shall receive noble treatment at my hands. She is in herself greater than anything you can conceive of, and you must approach her with the most profound respect, or not at all. Understand, too, that your friends must never venture to come near her. She chooses to live in complete retirement, and that is my choice also. In that retirement she will win honour for herself in her own way. I require of you that you do not compel me to blush for you before this wife of my own choosing. You shall not compel me to do that twice. I will have no meddling—no questioning, no advising. The small house that you affect to despise, knowing that I could command a better if I chose, must at all times be approached by you with reverence, in consideration of the one inmate who must henceforth be my world. Do not commit any mistake in these particulars; do not suppose that I will overlook any exhibition of littleness on your part. I have nothing further to say, and I will hear nothing further from you. I am tired, and must bid you good night.”

He approached the door, unbolted it, and walked out, leaving the Misses Thorpe overwhelmed with a certain kind of consternation.

It is as impossible to impress a small mind greatly as it is to compel a small vessel to hold all that may be contained in a larger one. Edward Thorpe's words and manner had frightened his sisters a little, humbled them a little for the moment; but their own opinions remained rampant as ever; and when they had recovered themselves, they were more indignant than ever, for they were compelled to feel that they were every way powerless. Reminded by their brother of the fact of his being master of Moorlands, they remembered it; but their instincts assured them that they were in no danger of being dispossessed. It was bad enough not to be sufficiently independent to be able to decline holding any communication with Edward Thorpe and his wife. The great fact of their being about to be disgraced in the eyes of the world, remained uppermost in their thoughts; and they lay awake half the night, wondering what they should say to the Misses Winstay in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWELVE months after the death of Mr. Osborne, a family party was assembled in the drawing-room in Brook Street, consisting of Lady Otley, her four daughters, her son, Lord Otley; her sister, the Countess of Flamburgh; her sister's son, the Honourable Captain Selwyn; and her brother, the Dean. Being only a family party, every one was at their ease. The Dean, reclined in a luxurious-looking chair, was reading the "Times" newspaper; Lord Otley was lounging about the room, twirling his moustache, and occasionally pausing to survey himself in the chimney-glass; Captain Selwyn was engaged in a flirting conversation with his youngest cousin, Amelia; the three elder sisters were severally engaged in reading and writing; the Countess who had recently arrived from Italy, and who appeared to be an invalid,

was reclined full-length upon a couch; and Lady Otley herself, quite as vivacious as ever, was giving the latter an account of the last drawing-room. The Countess, who was as whimsical as an invalid can well be, soon exhibited signs of being wearied.

“That’s all the old thing over again,” she said: “pray do talk about something else. You have to tell me all about the Osborne affair, you know; for positively I could not retain the facts, though you wrote so frequently concerning them. Ill health has certainly impaired my memory. And pray, Eliza, consider my nerves a little, and don’t talk so fast.”

The Dean lifted his eyes from his paper.

“If you have really forgotten the particulars, Laura,” he said, “I wish you to pay great attention to what Eliza will have to say on this subject. It is the most extraordinary case of—a—ingratitude on the part of Walter Osborne that ever came under my observation. You will see how the Desborough family has been mixed up with it all through.”

“Oh, those Desboroughs!” exclaimed Lady Otley, lifting her hands and eyebrows; “it is impossible to describe the trouble they have been to me ever since I was first married. I can

scarcely speak of them with any degree of patience, but I will try."

"Can't you leave them out altogether?" said the languid Countess. "You know I never had any intercourse with them myself; and I have a perfect horror of hearing anything about troublesome people."

"It's quite impossible to speak on this subject without bringing the Desboroughs in, for they have been the mischief-makers all through," said Lady Otley.

"Then, go on, pray, and be as brief as you can," said the Countess, settling herself in her pillows, and yawning.

Lady Otley went on, giving her own version of many matters, until she arrived at the period of Walter Osborne's visit, previous to going into Yorkshire to see his father.

"Of course," she continued, "*I* had no objection to his feeling an interest in the welfare of his friend's sisters, but I suspected the existence of a most foolish attachment to one of them, that would have led me to interfere if it had gone further. I went to Hampton Court on the following day, and delivered the packet he had left with me—(I am sure it contained a large sum of money)—into Miss Avice's hands,

and she received it in her cold, thankless way. The sale was to take place shortly (I did not exactly know when), and I asked her about her plans for the future. She so evidently held back that I did not press her more at that time. The next thing I heard was that the sale had taken place, and that the two girls and the nurse had disappeared. I sent Thomas down to Hampton Court to make strict inquiry about them, but nothing was to be heard, except that they had gone by coach to London. I even took the trouble of going down myself, and the result was the same. I said to my girls at the time, 'When that mad boy comes back, he will expect me to give him an account of these missing people.' And, surely enough, he did, when he made his appearance a week afterwards. Talk of nerves! If my nerves had been like yours, Laura, he would have destroyed them altogether. He perfectly stormed at me; accused me of being accessory to their disappearance; would not hear what I had to say in my own defence."

"Remember," said the Dean, raising his forefinger; "don't for a moment forget, that up to this time Lady Otley had been a mother to him; these girls had been sisters to him; Otley

had been a brother to him—a—Otley would have been a brother to him, if his coarseness would have admitted of such close companionship. Don't lose sight of these facts as you go on."

"I bore all Walter's rudeness and injustice as only a mother could have done," continued Lady Otley. "I parted from him on that occasion with real sorrow; and he must have seen that I did. I afterwards learned that he immediately went down to Hampton Court to make inquiries on his own account, and he succeeded no better than I had done. He went to my solicitor—he went to the man who had purchased the furniture—no one could give him any clue to the fugitives. Then he came again to me, and was as imperious as ever. I will not repeat all that he said to me on that occasion, for you would wonder at my bearing with him as I did. He seemed to think that I had stowed the two Desborough girls away somewhere, and would not allow him to communicate with them. At length he asked if I would furnish him with their address, if I was able to procure it; and I, of course, said I would. Then he declared that he would not enter my house again until I had so far satisfied him of my good faith."

“Mark all this, Laura,” said the Dean, again raising his forefinger; “observe his utter want of thought and regard for those who had always been devoted to him.”

“You may believe that, loving him as I did, bearing with him as I did, I would readily enough have supplied him with the information he sought, if I could,” continued Lady Otley. “I suspected that Avice Desborough would not correspond with me, and I was right. I heard nothing from her; but before long I heard strange news of Walter. I was informed that he had commenced studying for the bar; that he was living in the chambers in the Temple that had been occupied by Phillip Desborough. I learned that he was himself the purchaser of the furniture, for which he had, doubtless, paid liberally; and that he was scrupulous about keeping the chambers in the exact state in which the young man had left them. We considered all this to be only a romantic freak on the part of a very young man; and when his father died, and he became possessed of immense property, we expected to see a change for the better. But no: he still continued to study for the bar, to occupy the same chambers, to live in the same poor way. I wrote to him, and remonstrated—

I even went to see him ; and he behaved so uncivilly that it was impossible for me to go near him again."

"He behaved in this way, understand," said the Dean, "knowing that Lady Otley had always been more than a mother to him."

"The next news we heard," continued Lady Otley, "was that his sister was a confirmed lunatic ; and that Mr. Osborne had directed, in his will, that she was to remain during her life at Stanton Court, under the care of the keeper whom he appointed, and paid well for this service. You know what sort of person Mr. Osborne was, and that it was impossible for us to visit at Stanton Court during his lifetime. That poor creature, Lady Cope, was always equally inaccessible, for other reasons ; so, when Walter failed us—Walter, on whom we had every right to rely—this important family connection seemed to become nothing to us. I wrote to Lady Cope, feeling naturally interested in Miss Osborne, as I told her ; I offered to afford her any help in my power, knowing that she also was left in charge of Miss Osborne ; but, in reply, she informed me, very stiffly and briefly, that circumstances rendered it impossible

for her to hold any further communication with the world. Twelve months have elapsed since Mr. Osborne's death, and Walter is still living in the same poor chambers, still studying hard for the bar, as if possessed by some insane idea that he was compelled to work for a living. Imagine all that fine property lying useless; imagine what I must have suffered, loving Walter as I always did, and having been treated by him as I have been!"

"Consider the whole gross ingratitude of Walter Osborne," said the Dean; "the—a—the utter want of human feeling that he has exhibited throughout. Such conduct as his is unparalleled; and I, who have witnessed Eliza's sufferings, cannot forgive him."

"Oh, it is all too dreadful!" said the Countess. "Arabella, give me my vinaigrette; my poor shattered nerves will scarcely bear a continuance of the subject. But I must say this—has it never occurred to you that the whole family are insane?"

"It did occur to me long ago," said Lord Otley, speaking eagerly, as he generally did. "I told ma and my sisters long ago that Walter was mad as a March hare, but they wouldn't

believe me ; they always took his part against me, and what was I to do ? Mamma and my uncles always said I must be friendly with him, and I did the best I could ; but we never could get on together. He never would mix with the fellows of my set, and he didn't understand that I couldn't take up with anybody as he did. Then he was so rough and coarse that I was always ashamed of him. I never saw anything like it."

"My dear Henry, don't talk so fast," said the Countess ; "consider my nerves. I feel quite sure that you always took the right view of the matter ; every one must see that now."

"Of course, Otley took the right view of the matter," said the Dean. "Otley was too refined for Walter Osborne ; your sister was too tender-hearted for him ; I—a—we were altogether too scrupulously sincere, too much under the influence of Christian principle, to suit him at all. I consider his not liking us a great compliment ; but we must not forget the many disadvantages under which he has laboured, and that it is still our duty to turn to him, if he affords us the opportunity. For my part, I must confess that,

having done my best towards effecting a reconciliation, and having been treated by him with—a—with absolute rudeness, I must stand aloof for the present at least. It is curious that we do not hear of his associating with any one just now; he certainly has been seized with a mania for studying, which is curious, considering his character altogether—a—it would be curious to us if we did not understand that he is the most likely person in the world to indulge in extravagant whims of the moment. From what I have seen of him, I should say that he is quite likely to become absolutely dissipated to-morrow. It is a great pity that superior mental and moral power seem to have no influence whatever over him.”

“I have a dim recollection, Eliza,” said the Countess—whose defective memory had a trick of frequently reviving recollections that others wished to remain buried in the past—“of your telling me that Walter was strongly attached to—Amelia, wasn’t it? I have reason to believe that Amelia was not at all attached to him.”

“Oh, aunt, how could I be?” exclaimed Amelia. “I never could endure him when we

played together as children ; he was always a perfect bear."

"My dear, nearly all men are bears," said the languid Countess ; "and a bear with twenty thousand a-year is at least endurable."

"I can't help thinking that the good things of this world are very unequally distributed," said Captain Selwyn, yawning as he spoke. "Only think of a fellow like that having twenty thousand a-year ! By Jove ! if I had it I'd put it to some purpose—eh, Otley ?"

"I wish you had it, Reginald, or that I had it," said Otley. "It does seem a shame that such a fellow as Walter Osborne should possess an income like that."

"I cannot, as a Christian minister, encourage a love of money in any, least of all in those immediately belonging to me," said the Dean ; "but it does seem to me that when God gives great responsibilities, whether of wealth or rank, it is very sinful to neglect the opportunities that are evidently offered. I must say that I myself consider Walter Osborne to be quite unworthy of the providential care that was originally lavished upon him. He does no good with his money for himself or others. When he makes

use of it at all it is in an insane sort of way. I have heard that he has placed unlimited means at the disposal of the person who has charge of his sister, it being his wish that his sister should be gratified in any and every way in which she is found capable of receiving gratification. The person I have mentioned—a Mr. Rycroft, who was Mr. Osborne's steward—is a very vulgar man I have been told ; and, of course, in addition to the ample provision made for him by Mr. Osborne, these unlimited means will go into his own pocket. This is clearly putting money to an unworthy use. It is a sad thing that no one has been able to acquire sufficient influence over Walter to guide him in matters of this kind."

"You see, Laura," said Lady Otley, "we have had many disappointments of late. There is that Mr. Vernon, who did *not* die before Miss de Burgh."

"Ah, Mr. Vernon ! I recollect," said the Countess. "He that was such a devoted admirer of Miss de Burgh, during more than half a century, and who always declared that she should be his heir if he died first. I don't understand attachments of that kind. He is still living, I suppose ?"

“And quite likely to live many years yet,” said Lady Otley. “Since Miss de Burgh’s death, he has been doing the oddest things. First, he called upon us, seven or eight months ago—us, whom he had never visited before. He sat and chatted pleasantly a long time; and at last he asked about Miss de Burgh’s nieces—not about Clementina, the eldest, at all; but about the other two; and of course I could give him no information respecting them. I told him all I knew; I told him what a piece of work I had had with Walter about them; and he allowed that it must have been very distressing to me. Directly after that, he rose up to go, and made such an odd speech—what was it now? Oh! he said—he was speaking of Avice Desborough—‘Poor thing, poor thing; if she’s unfortunate enough, and unhappy enough, she’ll live long enough, not a doubt of it. I wish you good day.’ And he quitted the house in the most abrupt manner, before I could say anything that I wanted to say.”

“I have a perfect horror of odd people,” said the Countess.

“I considered it right to return the compliment, and visit him,” continued Lady Otley;

“but, after calling many times, and always finding him not at home, I considered that he denied himself purposely, and did not go again. Soon afterwards, we heard that he had purchased all the property formerly belonging to the Desboroughs, including Stan Place, where he is residing at this moment, and where he is making the greatest improvements.”

“Making really a grand place of it, I am told,” said the Dean. “It is really an odd thing for one of his penurious habits to do. There is no accounting for the—a—for the vagaries of eccentricity.”

“I wonder,” said the Countess, musing, “whether, if he had met with Avice Desborough, he would have been inclined to take to her.”

“No, no,” said Lady Otley and the Dean together. “He knew all about Clementina’s marriage; he knew where to address her,” continued Lady Otley; “but, depend upon it, he will never trouble himself about her or any one of the family. He has always liked to please himself; that is all he thinks of, and that is what he is doing now.”

“What a dreadfully selfish person!” exclaimed

the Countess. “Really, as one grows older, the world seems too dreadful altogether.”

“There is a fearful amount of selfishness in the world, no doubt,” said the Dean; “let us shun these bad examples while we—a—while we deplore them. To return to Walter Osborne, to whom we owe a duty—never let us lose sight of a duty. Eliza and I have been thinking, Laura, that some good might be effected by your calling upon him. Your relationship gives you the privilege; you have resided abroad so many years that you may naturally be supposed to be anxious to see him; and he can have no quarrel with you in consequence of what has inevitably happened. I am considering the matter merely in a Christian point of view: it seems to me that this young man will be completely lost if some effort is not made in his behalf.”

“Oh, you are so good, you know, and you expect us all to be so like you,” said the Countess, yawning again. “If I make this very great effort, all the credit will be due to you, and that is disheartening to begin with. But come nearer to me, all of you, and let me hear what all have to say on this subject.”

Those present obeyed this summons with

alacrity ; and the result of a lengthened discussion was, that the Countess of Flamburgh, armed at all points, should pay a visit to Walter Osborne on the following day.

END OF VOL. I.

